

Romeo and Juliet

by William Shakespeare

Presented by Paul W. Collins

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Chapter One Cold Fire

The distinguished gentleman who comes forward as Prologue speaks solemnly.
“Two households, both alike in dignity in fair Verona, where we lay our scene, from ancient grudge break to new mutiny—uncivil blood makes civil hands unclean!”

He moves closer. “From forth the fatal loins of these two foes, a pair of star-crossed lovers take their life—whose misadventured, piteous overthrow doth with their death bury their parents’ strife.

“The fearful passage of their death-marked love in the continuance of their parents’ rage—that nought but children’s end could remove—is now the two hours’ traffic of our stage.

“The which, if you with patient ears attend, what they shall miss, our toil will strive to mend....”

In a northern Italian city one sunny July afternoon during the 16th century, two young serving-men, both employed by the powerful House of Capulet, saunter proudly onto a public street just outside its lord’s tall mansion.

Belligerent defiance is a chronic posture against the always imminent—if only imagined—threat posed by a rival Veronese family, the Montagues. Sampson, sixteen, cocky and perpetually aggrieved, today declares, “Gregory, o’ my word, we’ll not *carry coals!*”—suppress anger.

“No. For then we should be *colliers.*” In popular perception, coal men are uncouth and cowardly.

“I mean, if we be in *cholera*, we’ll *draw!*” Both are armed with rapier and dagger, and each carries a buckler, a small shield, on his arm.

Gregory, eighteen, again replies with a quip: “Aye. While you live, draw your *neck* out o’ the *collar.*” He knows that Sampson’s sword—a fancy one—has been unsheathed only for practice.

“I strike *quickly*, being moved!” says Sampson.

“But thou art not quickly moved to strike,” notes the older lad.

“A dog of the House of *Montague* moves me!”

Gregory is inured to the old feud’s hot but pointless rhetoric—and his wit tends toward the ribald: “To move is to *stir*, and to be valiant is to *stand*; therefore, if thou art *moved*, thou *runn’st away!*”—dribble, after ejaculating.

“A *dog* of that house shall move me to stand! I will make a *wall* against any man or maid of *Montague’s!*”

“That shows thee a weak slave,” counters Gregory, “for the weakest ‘goes to the wall’”—walks a safe distance from street traffic.

“True—and therefore *women*, being the weaker vessels, are ever *thrust* to the wall! So I will push Montague’s men *from* the wall, and thrust his maids *to* the wall!”

Gregory, who has a sister, frowns. “The quarrel is between our masters and us, their *men.*”

“’Tis all one. I will show myself a *tyrant!*” says the bellicose boy. “When I have fought with the men, I will be cruel with the maids, and cut off their heads!”

“The heads of the *maids?*”

Now Sampson, too, waxes sensual. “Aye, the heads of the maids!—or their *maidenheads*; take it in what sense thou wilt!”

“They must take it in *sense* who *feel* it.”

Sampson smirks. “Me they *shall* feel while I am able to stand!—and ’tis known I am a pretty piece of *flesh!*”

“’Tis well thou art not *fish*, Gregory gibes. “Thou hadst been *poor-John!*”—*stiff*, but as is the dried-and-salted fish. He grins as an opportunity arises. “*Draw thy tool!* Here come two from the House of the Montagues!”

“My naked weapon is out,” says Sampson—meaning he’s up for a fight. “*Quarrel,*” he urges. “I will back thee!”

Gregory teases: “How? *Turn* thy back, and *run*?”

“Fear not for me!”

“No, marry!” laughs Gregory. “I fear *thee*!” The boy is too impulsive.

“Let us take the *law* on our sides,” says Sampson, growing more cautious as the others near. “Let *them* begin.”

“I will frown as they pass by, and let them take it as they list.”

“Nay—as they *dare*! I will bite my thumb at them—which is a *disgrace* to them, if they bear it!”

As two of their Montague counterparts, Abram and Balthasar, walk past, Sampson snaps the nail of his right thumb from his upper front teeth.

Abram stops. “Do you *bite your thumb* at us, sir?”

“I do bite my thumb, sir.”

“Do you bite your thumb at *us*, sir?”

Sampson quietly asks Gregory: “Is the law of our side, if I say *aye*?”

“No.”

“No, sir, I do not bite my thumb at *you*, sir,” says Sampson, “—but I *bite* my thumb, sir!”

Gregory presses the confrontation. “Do you *quarrel*, sir?”

“Quarrel, sir?” asks Abram. “No, sir.”

“If you *do*, sir, I am *for* you!” says Sampson. “I serve as good a man as *you*!”—an unintentionally ambiguous challenge.

“No *better*,” Abram retorts.

Sampson only mutters. “Well, sir.”

“Say ‘*better*!’” demands Gregory. “Here comes one of my master’s *kinsmen*!”

Sampson, seeing the young nobleman, now insists, “Yes, ‘*better*,’ sir!”

Abram steps toward them, scowling. “You *lie*!”

“*Draw*, if you be *men*!” cries Sampson, drawing his sword. “Gregory, remember thy *swashing* blow!”

Benvolio, Lord Montague’s nephew, reaches them just as the four begin to flail ineptly, their clashing rapiers bounced back by the others’ clumsy counter-strokes. “*Part, fools!*” he cries, irked; the public scuffle will likely bring trouble to both families from the city’s authorities. “*Put up your swords*; you know not what you do!” Skilled with his own weapon, he beats down their lighter ones.

But then Lord Capulet’s nephew, Tybalt, arrives. “What?—art thou *drawn* among these artless hinds?” he asks the other scion scornfully, drawing his blade. “*Turn* thee, Benvolio! Look upon thy *death*!”

“I do but keep the *peace*!” protests the Montague. “Put up thy sword, or manage it with me to part these men!”

“What?—*drawn*, and talk of *peace*! I *hate* the word, as I hate Hell, all Montagues, and *thee*! Have *at* thee, *coward*!”

And so they, too, fight. Soon, other serving-men from both houses have come out to join the ignoble conflict.

The tumult draws indignant citizens from the vicinity. Intrusions of the neighbors’ eight-foot-long, wide-bladed partisans, and blows of their heavy clubs add painful emphasis to their displeasure with this latest disturbance. “*Strike!* Beat them down!” they cry. “*Down* with the *Capulets!*” “*Down* with the *Montagues!*”

Grey-bearded Lord Capulet hurries down the wide stone steps from his house to the street, followed by Lady Capulet and a servant. “What *noise* is *this*?” He sees the combat. “Give me my long sword, *ho!*” he demands.

His wife scowls. “A crutch, a *crutch*! Why call you for a sword?”

“My *sword*, I say!” cries Capulet, pointing across the way: “Old *Montague* is come, and flourishes his blade in *despite* of me!”

Indeed, Lord and Lady Montague have heard the commotion, and, followed by a stream of servants, are rushing down to the pavement.

“Thou *villain*, Capulet!” shouts Montague, struggling with a heavy broadsword. “Hold me *not*, let me *go!*” he tells his serving-men—although no one is restraining him.

Lady Montague, frowning, blocks him from entering the boisterous battle. “Thou shalt not stir a *foot* to *seek* a foe!”

And then into the municipal square rides an angry Prince Escalus, lord of Verona, with his armed attendants in train on foot.

“*Rebellious* subjects!” shouts the prince, dismounting, “enemies to *peace*, *profaners* of this neighbour-stained steel!” Despite his call, they continue fighting. “Will they not *hear?*”

He is furious. “*What, ho!* You *men*—you *beasts* that quench the fire of your pernicious rage with purple fountains issuing from your veins! On pain of *torture*, from those bloody hands throw your mistempered weapons to the ground, and *hear* the sentence of your movèd *prince!*”

The rioters, out of breath, separate and, one by one, drop their blades.

The prince glares at them all. “*Three* civil *brawls*, bred of any airy *word* by thee, old Capulet and Montague, have thrice disturbed the quiet of our streets, and made Verona’s ancient citizens cast aside their gravely *beseeming* ornaments to wield *old* *partisans*—in *hands* as old, cankered with *peace*—to part your cankered *hate!*”

Rage is resonant in his stern voice: “If ever you disturb our streets *again*, your *lives* shall pay the forfeit of the peace!

“For this time, all the rest depart away! *You*, Capulet, shall go along with me; and, Montague, come you this afternoon, to know our further pleasure in this case, to old Free-town, our common judgment-place.

“Once more: *on pain of death*, all men *depart!*”

The injured and bleeding limp away, some only with help, and soon the street clears. Followed by the distraught Lord Capulet, the prince and his retinue leave.

Who set this ancient quarrel new abroad?” asks Montague. “Speak, nephew! Were you by when it began?”

Benvolio points to the corner. “Here were the servants of your adversary and yours close fighting ere I did approach!—I drew to *part* them!

“On the instant came the fiery *Tybalt*, preparèd with his *sword!*—which, as he breathed defiance to my ears, he swung about his head and cut the *winds!*—which, nothing *hurt* withal, hissed him in scorn. While we were interchanging thrusts and blows came more and more, and fought on, part and party, till came the prince, who parted either part.”

“Oh, where is *Romeo?*” asks Lady Montague, concerned. “Saw you him today? Right glad I am *he* was not at this fray!”

“Madam, an hour before the worshippèd sun peered forth the golden window of the east, a troubled mind drove me to walk abroad—where, underneath the grove of sycamore that westward rooteth from the city’s side, so early walking did I see your son.

“Towards him I made; but he was wary of me, and stole into the covert of the wood. I—measuring his affections by my own, that most are busied when they’re most alone—pursued my mood by not pursuing his, and gladly shunned who gladly fled from me.”

Lord Montague nods. “Many a morning hath he there been seen, with *tears* augmenting the fresh morning dew, adding to clouds *more* clouds with his deep sighs! But so soon as the all-cheering sun should in the furthest east begin to draw the shady curtains from Aurora’s bed, away from the light steals home my sad son, and privately in his chamber pens himself—shuts up his windows, locks fair daylight out, and makes for himself an artificial *night*.

“Black and portentous must this humour prove, unless good counsel may the cause remove!”

“My noble uncle, do you know the cause?”

“I neither know nor can learn it of him.”

“Have you importuned him by any means?”

“Both by myself and many other friends! But he, his own affection’s counselor, is to himself... I will not say how *true*, but to himself so *secret* and so *closed*, so far from sounding and discovery, as is a bud bitten by an envious caterpillar ere it can spread its sweet leaves to the air, or dedicate its beauty to the sun.

“Could we but learn from whence his sorrows grow, we would as willingly *give cure* as *know!*”

“See, where he comes,” says Benvolio, spotting Romeo some distance away, walking toward home. “So please you, step aside; I’ll know his grievance, or be much denied!”

“I would thou wert so happy as by thy stay to hear true shrift,” says Montague. “Come, madam, let’s away.” They head into his large ancestral home.

“Good morrow, cousin!” calls Benvolio.

Romeo, sixteen and much distracted, glances at the sky. “Is the day so young?”

“But newly struck nine.”

“Ay, me! Sad hours seem long. Was that my father that went hence so fast?”

“It was. What sadness lengthens Romeo’s hours?”

“Not having that which, having, makes them short.”

“In love?”

“Out.”

“Of love?”

“Out of her *favour* where I am in love,” says Romeo.

“Alas, that Love, so *gentle* as he’s seen, should be so tyrannous and rough in *proof!*”

“Alas that Love, whose view is muffled still,”—Cupid is blind, “should without ‘*ayes*’ seek pathways to his will,” sighs Romeo. “Where shall we dine?”

Looking around, now, he notices that the pavement is freshly spattered with red. He can see torn-off buttons and bloody footprints. “*Oh, me!* What *fray* was here?” He shakes his head, having seen too much feuding. “Yet tell me not, for I have heard it all!”

Suffering the pain of one who is both infatuated and rejected, he touches his chest: “*Here’s* much to-do with hate, but more with *love!*” He laughs sourly. “Why then a *brawling* love, a *loving* hatred—an anything from *nothing* first created! O heavy lightness, grave triviality, misshapen *chaos* of *well-seeming* forms! Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health, ever-wakeful *sleep* that is *not* what it is!

“*This* love feel I, who feel *no* love in this!” The young, heartsick Romeo, his world disordered, looks at Benvolio. “Dost thou not laugh?”

“No, coz. I rather *weep.*”

“Good heart, at what?”

“At thy good heart’s oppression.”

“Why, such is love’s *transgression*: grief of mine own lies heavy in my breast—which thou wilt *propagate*, pressing it down with more of *thine!* This love that thou hast shown doth add more grief to too-much of mine own!

“Love is a *smoke*, raised with the fume of sighs being urged by *fire* sparking in lovers’ eyes, vexed by a sea nourished with lovers’ *tears!* What is it else?—a *madness* most *discreet*, a choking *gall* and a preserving *sweet!*”

He moves to leave. “Farewell, my coz.”

But Benvolio has felt such pain. “Soft, I would go along—and if you *leave* me so, you do me wrong!”

“I have left *myself*; I am not here—this is not *Romeo*, he’s some other where.”

“Tell me who it is that you love in sadness.”

“What, shall I *groan* and tell thee?”

“Groan!” laughs Benvolio, “why, *no!* But tell me, seriously, *who.*”

“You bid a *sick* man make his *will* in *seriousness!*—a word ill-urged to one that is so ill! *Seriously*, cousin, I do love... a woman.”

Says Benvolio dryly, “I aimed so near when I supposed you loved.”

“A right good *mark-man!* And she’s *fair* whom I love.”

“A right fair mark, fair coz, is soonest hit!”

“Well, in *that* hit you miss: *she’ll* not be hit with *Cupid’s* arrow! She hath Dian’s wit, and in strong proof of chastity is well armed; from Love’s weak, childish bow she lives unharmed. She will not hear the siege of loving terms, nor abide the encounter of assailing eyes, nor ope her lap to saint-seducing gold.

“*Oh*, she is *rich* in beauty!—only poor in that, when she dies, of that beauty dies her store.”

“Then she hath sworn that she will live ever *chaste?*”

“She hath—and in that *saving* makes huge *waste*, for beauty starvèd with *her* severity cuts beauty off from all posterity! She is too fair, too wise, *unwisely* to fare: meriting of bliss by making *me* despair!” he protests. “*She* hath forsworn to love, and in that vow do *I* live!—dead, who lives to tell of it now.”

Benvolio has advice. “Be ruled by me: forget to think of her.”

“*Oh*, teach me how I should forget to *think!*”

At all of twenty, Benvolio can speak from experience: “By giving liberty unto thine *eyes*: examine *other* beauties!”

Romeo shakes his head. “’Tis but the way to call *hers*, exquisite, into estimation more! These happy masks that kiss fair ladies’ brows, being *dark*, put us in mind that they hide the *fair!* He that is stricken blind cannot forget the precious treasure of his eyesight lost!

“Show me a mistress that surpasses fair; how doth her beauty serve but as a note where I may read who *surpassed* that surpassing fair?”

“Farewell! Thou canst not teach me to *forget.*”

“I’ll *pay* that doctrine, or else die in debt!” vows Benvolio, going with him, and determined to help his melancholy cousin.

Chapter Two Prospects of Love

Lord Capulet, having endured hearing the prince’s direst warnings yet, has resumed his good spirits. He walks home along a familiar wide avenue in the sunlight-soaked city, accompanied by Count Paris, a young kinsman of Prince Escalus. “But Montague is bound as well as I, in penalty alike; and ’tis not hard, I think, for men so old as we to keep the peace.”

“Of honourable reckoning are you both,” says the count, “and pity ’tis you lived at odds so long.” He stops. “But now, my lord, what say you to my suit?”

“But by saying o’er what I have said before,” Capulet replies, kindly. “My child is yet a stranger in the world: she hath not seen the change of fourteen years. Let two more summers wither in their pride ere we may think her ripe to be a bride.”

“Younger than she are happy mothers made,” the count points out.

“And too soon marred are those so early made. The earth hath swallowed all my hopes but she; she is the hopeful lady of my earth.

“But *woo* her, gentle Paris—get her *heart!* My will to her consent is but a part; if she agree, within her scope of choice lie my consent and fair-according voice.

“This night I hold an old accustomed feast, whereto I have invited many a guest, such as I love; and you, among the store one most welcome, make my number more.

“At my poor house, look to behold this night *earth*-treading stars that make dark *heaven* light! Such *discomfort* as do lusty young *men* feel when well-appareled April on the heel of

limping winter treads, such *delight* among fresh female buds shall be exhibited at my house tonight!

“Hear all, all see, but like her most whose *merit* most shall be!—in which more view of *many*, mine, being *one*, may stand in number, though in *reckoning* none.

“Come, go with me.”

But first, Lord Capulet pulls the list of guests from inside his coat and hands it to one of his serving-men, portly Peter. “Go, sirrah; trudge about through fair Verona. Find those persons out whose names are written here, and to them say that my house and welcome on their pleasure stay!”

The noblemen go blithely on their way—leaving Peter in some distress.

Find them out whose names are written here! groans the heavy man to himself. *Is it written that the shoemaker should meddle with his yard, and the tailor with his last, the fisher with his pencil, and the painter with his nets? I am sent to find those persons whose names are here writ, who can never find what names the writing person hath here writ!* As are many, the servant is illiterate.

I must to the learnèd. And just then he sees potential help on the way. *In good time!*

As Benvolio walks with Romeo, he offers counsel. “Man, one fire burns out another’s burning; one pain is lessened by another’s anguish! Turn giddy, and be help by backward turning; one desperate grief cure with another’s languish! Take thou some *new* infection to thy eye, and the rank poison of the old will die!”

“Your plantain-leaf is excellent for that. . . .”

“For what, I pray thee?”

“For your *broken shin!*” He resents the palliative placebos.

Benvolio frowns in frustration. “Why, Romeo, art thou mad?”

“Not mad, but *bound more* than a madman is!—shut up in prison, kept without my food, whipped and *tormented*, and—” But a serving-man is approaching him. “Good e’en, good fellow.”

“God gi’ good e’en,” says Peter politely, holding Lord Capulet’s list. “I pray, sir, can you read?”

“Aye,” says Romeo sourly, “mine own fortune in my *misery!*”

Peter shrugs. “Perhaps you have learned that without book. But, I pray, can you read any thing you *see?*”

“Aye—if I know the letters and the language.”

Taking that for a wry *no*, the man replies, “Ye say honestly.” He bows. “Rest you merry.”

“Stay, fellow; I can read,” says Romeo kindly. He unfolds the paper and reads aloud:

“Signior Martino and his wife and daughters; Count Anselme and his beauteous sisters; the lady widow of Vitravio; Signior Placentio and his lovely nieces; Mercutio and his brother Valentine; mine uncle Capulet, his wife and daughters. . . .” Romeo gulps. “. . . my fair niece *Rosaline*; Livia; Signior Valentio and his cousin Tybalt; Lucio; and the lively Helena.” He sees Benvolio’s grin.

“A fair assembly,” says Romeo casually. “Whither should they come?”

“Sup.”

“Whither?”

“To *supper*—to our house.”

“Whose house?”

“My master’s.”

Romeo is patient. “Indeed, I should have asked you that before.”

The servant, grateful, relents from his customary policy of obtuseness in the face of authority. “Now I’ll tell you without asking: my master is the great, rich *Capulet!*—and if you be not of the House of Montagues, I pray you come and dash a cup of wine!

“Rest you merry!” he says, heading off to convey invitations to the annual event.

Benvolio is elated. “At this same ancient feast of Capulet’s supps the fair *Rosaline* whom thou so lovest—with *all* the admirèd beauties of Verona! Go thither,” he advises, “and with unattainted eye compare *her* face with some that I shall show, and it will make thee think thy swan a *crow!*”

Romeo scoffs, “When the devout religion of *mine* eyes maintain such falsehood, then turn tears to *fires*, and these transparent *heretics*—which, often drownèd, could never die—be burnt for *liars!* One fairer than *my* love?—the all-seeing *sun* ne’er saw her match since first the world begun!”

Benvolio challenges: “You saw her fair, *none else* being by—herself posèd with *herself* in either eye! But in that crystal scale let there be weighed your lady-love against some other maid that I will show you shining at this fest, and she shall scant show *well* who now shows best!”

“I’ll go along,” says Romeo, “no such sight to be shown, but to rejoice in the splendor of mine own!”

Nurse, where’s my daughter?” asks Lady Capulet, upstairs at home. “Call her forth to me.”

The plump nursery maid smiles to remember first summoning the child—to its birth: “Now, by my maidenhead, at *twelve year old* I bade her come!” She calls: “*What*, lamb! *What*, ladybird!

“God forbid! *Where’s* this girl?” she mumbles, going toward the bedroom. “*What*, *Juliet!*”

“How now? Who calls?” asks the girl, coming to the door.

“Your mother,” says the nurse.

“Madam, I am here.” Juliet enters and curtseys. “What is your will?”

“This is the matter—” Lady Capulet begins. “Nurse, give leave awhile, we must talk in secret.” But then: “Nurse, come back again. I have remembered me; thou shall hear our counsel. Thou know’st my daughter’s of a pretty age....”

“Faith, I can tell her age unto an hour!”

“She’s not fourteen,” notes the lady.

The nurse nods vigorously. “I’ll lay fourteen of my teeth—and yet *to my teeth* be it spoken,”—as in charging a lie, “I have but *four*—she is *not* fourteen!” She thinks. “How long is it now to Lammas-tide?”

“A fortnight, and odd days.”

“Even *or* odd, out of all days in the year, come Lammas-eve at night shall she be fourteen!”

The nurse remembers her own daughter. “Susan and she—God rest all Christian souls!—were of an age. Well, Susan is with God; she was too good for *me*.

“But, as I said, on Lammas-eve at night shall she be *fourteen!*—that *shall* she! Marry, I remember it well! ’Tis since the earthquake now *eleven* years; and she was by then weaned.

“I never shall forget it! Of all the days of the year, upon *that* day—for I had then laid wormwood to my dug,”—applied aromatic lotion to reduce soreness from nursing, “sitting in the sun against the dove-house wall—my lord and you were then at Mantua; nay, I do bear a brain!—but, as I said, when it did taste the wormwood on the nipple of my dug, and found it bitter, pretty fool—to see it turn *tetchy*, and *fall out* with the dug!”—frown at it. She laughs heartily, and recalls the infant’s wailing.

Then the earthquake hit. “*Shake!*” quoth the dove-house! But ’twas no *need*, I trow, to bid *me* trudge!

“And since *that* time it is *eleven* years; for then she could stand alone—nay, by the rood, she could have run and waddled all about—for even the day before she *broke her brow!*”

“And then my husband—God be with his soul, ’a was a merry man!—took up the child. ‘Yea,’ quoth he, ‘dost thou fall upon thy *face*? Thou wilt fall *backward* when thou hast more *wit*, wilt thou not, Jule?’”—a ribald quip. “And, by my holidame, the pretty wretch left crying and said ‘*Aye!*’” The nurse shakes with laughter. “To *see*, now, how a jest shall come about! I warrant, an I should live a thousand years, I never should forget it! ‘Wilt thou not, Jule?’ quoth he—and pretty fool said ‘*Aye!*’”

“Enough of this! I pray thee, hold thy peace,” demands impatient Lady Capulet.

“Yes, madam,” says the nurse. “—Yet I cannot choose but *laugh*, to think it should leave crying and say ‘*Aye!*’

“And yet, I warrant, it had upon its brow a bump as big as a young cockerel’s stone,”—rooster testicle, “a *parlous* knock, and it cried bitterly. ‘Yea,’ quoth my husband, ‘fall’st upon thy face? Thou wilt fall *backward* when thou comest to age, wilt thou not, Jule?’” She laughs again, remembering. “It said, unstinting, ‘*Aye!*’”

Juliet laughs: “But, I pray thee, stint now *you*, Nurse, say I!”

The garrulous servant yields. “Peace, I have done!” she chuckles, wiping her eyes. “God mark thee to his grace! Thou wast the prettiest babe that e’er I nursed! If I might live to see thee married *once*, I have my wish!”

Says Lady Capulet, “Marry, that ‘marry’ is the very theme I came to talk of. Tell me, daughter Juliet, how stands your disposition to be married?”

“It is an honour that I dream not of,” the girl says modestly.

“An *honour*,” sighs the servant, savoring the term. “Were not I thine only nurse, I would say thou hadst sucked *wisdom* from thy teat!”

“Well, think of marriage now,” Lady Capulet directs briskly. “Here in Verona ladies of esteem younger than you are already made mothers; by my count, I was *your* mother much upon these years that you are now a maid.

“Thus, then, in brief: the valiant Paris seeks you for his love.”

“A *man*, young lady!” The nurse is enthusiastic: “Lady, such a man as all the world— why, he’s a *man of wax!*” She means *an exemplar*.

“Verona’s summer hath not such a flower,” says Lady Capulet, more elegantly.

“*Aye*, he’s a *flower!*” cries the nurse. “In faith, a very *flower!*”

“What say you?” the lady asks her daughter. “Can you love the gentleman?” She doesn’t wait for an answer. “This night you shall behold him at our feast. Read o’er the volume of young Paris’ face, and find delight writ there with beauty’s pen. Examine every merry lineament, and see how one to another lends content; and what *obscured* in this fair volume lies, find written in the margent of his eyes. This precious book of love, this unbound lover, to beautify him lacks only a cover.

“As the fish lives in the sea, ’tis much pride for a fair outside the fair *within* to hide. That book in many eyes doth share a glory: in *gold clasps* it locks a *golden story*.” Lady Capulet has assessed the proposed match. “So shall you share all that he doth possess: by having him, making yourself no less.”

The worldly nurse laughs. “No *less*? Nay, *bigger!*—women *grow* by men!” She winks.

Cold Lady Capulet still regards Juliet. “Speak briefly,” she says. “Can you like of Paris’ love?”

“I’ll *look* to like, if looking liking move,” says young Juliet, “but no more deep will I endart mine eye than your consent gives strength to make it fly.”

The household’s harried major-domo rushes into the chamber. “Madam, the guests are *come*, supper *served up*; you are *called*, my young lady *asked for*, the nurse *cursed* in the pantry—and everything *in extremity!* I must hence to *wait*—I *beseech you*, follow *straight!*”

Lady Capulet waves him away. “We follow thee.

“Juliet, the count stays,”—is waiting, says the lady pointedly, as she leaves.

“Go, girl!” the lusty nurse tells Juliet. “Seek happy *nights* to happy *days!*”

Chapter Three Dark Encounters

At sunset, the earthy browns, ochers and reds of Verona's old buildings seem to glow, and by torches' flickering light the streets, washed clean by a passing shower, still glisten and shimmer.

Romeo and Benvolio are strolling in the summer evening's warm and sweetly fragrant air, but the Montagues wear masks, black and stitched with gold and silver, tied on to conceal their faces, for they are on their way to Lord Capulet's festive supper. With them is Romeo's older friend Mercutio, a noble kinsman of the prince; he has just been told about Peter's invitation.

"What, shall his speech be spoke for our excuse?" asks Romeo. "Or shall we go in without an apology?"

Benvolio replies, "The date is out for such prolixity! We'll have no *Cupid*, hoodwinked with a scarf, bearing a painted Tartar's bow of *lath*, snaring the ladies like a *crow keeper!*—nor no without-book Prologue, faintly speaking after the prompter, for *our* entrance!

"But let them measure us by what they will, we'll measure *them a measure!*"—dance better than they—"and be gone!"

"Give me a torch," sleepless Romeo tells a servant; he will be content simply to watch. "I am not for this ambling; being but *heavy*, I will bear the *light!*"

"Nay, gentle Romeo," says Mercutio, "we must have you *dance!*"

"Not I, believe me. You have dancing shoes with nimble soles; *I* have a soul of lead that so stakes me to the ground I cannot move."

"You are a *lover!*—borrow *Cupid's wings* and *soar* with them above the common bound!" urges Mercutio.

"I am too sore-empiercèd with his *shaft* to soar with his light feathers," counters Romeo. "And so *bound* I cannot bound a pitch above dull woe; under love's heavy burden do I sink."

"And would you burden *Love* to sink it in?" demands Mercutio. "Too great oppression for a *tender* thing!" *Thing* is a term for *penis*, and *Cupid* is an infant.

Romeo scoffs. "Is *love* a tender thing?—it is too *rough*, too *rude*, too *boisterous!*—and it pricks like *thorn!*"

Mercutio laughs cheerfully as they walk. "If love be rough with you, be rough with *love!* *Prick* love for pricking, and *beat down* love!

"Give *me a case* to put my visage in: a *visor* for a visor!"—a place in which to press a face engaged in deception; *case* can have a rude meaning. "What care I what curious eye doth quote deformities?" He ties on a comically grotesque, leering mask. "*Here* are the beetle-brows that shall blush for *me!*"

They have reached the steps in front of the Capulets' mansion. "Come, knock and enter," says merry Benvolio eagerly, "and no sooner in, but every man betake him to his legs!"

Romeo demurs: "A *torch* for *me*. Let wantons light of heart tickle the senseless rushes"—soft ones strewn as to cover a stone floor—"with their heels, for I am proverbied with a *grandsire* phrase: 'I'll be a candle-holder, and look on; the *game* was ne'er so fair, but *I* am done.'"

"*Dun* is the *mouse!*" cries Mercutio, protesting his friend's claim to grayness. "If thou art *done*—the *constable's* own word,"—for *finished with unlawful sex*, "we'll draw thee from the mire of this—save your reverence—*love* wherein thou stick'st up to the ears!" He claps an arm around the young man's shoulders. "Come, we burn daylight! *Ho!*"

"Nay, that's not so!" quibbles Romeo; it is night.

"I mean, sir, in delay we waste *our* lights in vain, like lamps by day," says Mercutio patiently. "Take our good *meaning!*—for your *judgment* sits *five times* in that ere once in the five wits"—senses.

Romeo, looking up at the entrance, frowns. “And we *mean* well in going to this mask, but ’tis no *wit* to go.”

“Why, may one ask?”

Romeo is apprehensive. “I dreamed a dream last night—”

“And so did *I!*”

“Well, what was yours?”

“That dreamers often *lie!*”

“In *bed*, asleep,” says Romeo, “while they do dream things *true.*”

But Mercutio is primed for an evening of fascination. “*Ah!*—then I see Queen *Mab* hath been with you!”

His eyes widen, and he speaks in a reverent hush: “She is the *fairies’* midwife, and she comes in shape no bigger than an agate-stone on the forefinger of an alderman!

“Her *chariot*, drawn by a team of little atomi athwart men’s noses as they lie asleep, is an empty hazelnut—made by the joiner squirrel, or Old Grub, time out o’ mind the fairies’ coach maker—her wagon’s spokes made of long-spinners’ legs, the cover of the wings of grasshoppers, the traces of the smallest spider’s web, the collars of the moonshine’s watery beams, her whip of a cricket’s bone, the lash of a film!

“Her *wagoner*: a small, grey-coated *gnat*, not so big as a little round-worm flicked from the lazy finger of a maid!

“And in this state she rides, night by night, o’er *lovers’* brains!—and then they *dream* of love!

“Sometime she gallops o’er a *courtier’s* nose, and then dreams he of smelling out a *boon*; and sometime comes she with a tithe-pig’s tail, tickling a *parson’s* hose as ’a lies asleep—then dreams he of a *better* benefice!

“Sometime she driveth o’er a *soldier’s* neck; and then dreams he of cutting foreign throats, of breaches, *ambuscadoes*, of healths, and of Spanish blades five-fathom deep!—and then, anon, *drums* in his ear, at which he starts and wakes!—and being thus frightened, swears a prayer or two, then sleeps again.

“O’er courtiers’ knees, they dream on *court’sies* straight; o’er fingers of lawyers, who straight dream on *fees*; o’er lips of ladies who straight on *kisses* dream—and whom oft the angry Mab with blisters plagues, because their breaths with sweetmeats tainted are!

“This is that very Mab that plaits the manes of horses in the night, and makes the elflocks of foul, sluttish hairs—which once entangled, much misfortune bodes! This is the hag that, when maidens lie on their backs, presses them and first teaches them to *bear*—making them women of *good carriage!* This is she—”

“Peace, peace, Mercutio, *peace!*” says Romeo, smiling in spite of himself. “Thou talk’st of nothing!”

“True; I talk of *dreams*, which are the children of an idle brain, begot of nothing but vain *fantasy*—which is as thin of substance as the air, and more inconstant than the *wind*, who woos even now the frozen bosom of the north, and, being angered, puffs away from thence, turning his face to the dew-dropping south—”

“This *wind* you talk of blows us from ourselves!” cries Benvolio as they stand at the Capulets’ threshold; the music-lover wants to be within. “Supper is done, and we shall come too late!”

Romeo is again pensive. *Too early, I fear! For my mind misgives: some consequence yet hanging in the stars shall bitterly begin its fearful term with this night’s revels, and expire the date of a despised life!—closing my breast, by some vile forfeit, in untimely death!*

But, He that hath the steerage of my course direct my sail! He takes a breath. “On, lusty gentlemen!”

As they enter the Capulets’ home, Benvolio is exuberant—and ready to dance: “*Strike, drum!*”

In a hot and crowded room adjoining the dining hall, restless musicians, pressed against a wall, wait to play for the guests, while frantic serving-men hurry back and forth, still cleaning up after the sumptuous meal: they carry silver trays of the remaining meat, fish and bread, used dishes and wet spoons, wrinkled napkins and the stubs of table-candles.

“Where’s *Potpan*, that he helps not to take away?” demands the pantry master. “He shift a trencher, he *scrape* a trencher!”—those he has piled on the table here won’t clean themselves.

Coming through with an armload of emptied bottles, the portly butler complains, of *Potpan* and the other server: “When good manners shall lie all in one or two men’s hands—and they *unwashèd*, too!—’tis a foul thing!”

The major-domo concurs, but has no time to commiserate. “Away with the joint-stools!” he orders. “Remove the count-cupboard; look to the plate!” The hall must now be readied for dancing. He calls to a servant rushing past, toward the larder at the back of the house: “Good thou, save me a piece of marchpane!—and, as thou lovest me, tell the porter to let in Susan Grindstone and Nell!” He again summons the servers: “*Antony* and *Potpan*!”

Suddenly they are present, if unkempt. “*Aye*, boy!—*ready*!”

“You are looked for and *called* for, asked for and *sought* for, in the great chamber!” the overseer tells them, in considerable pique.

Antony is indignant: “We cannot be here and *there*, too!” But he encourages the crew: “*Cheerly*, boys; be brisk awhile!—and may the longer liver take all!”

The musicians are already moving toward the door.

At the front of the house, just inside the entrance, the traffic is slower and more genteel, but no quieter. An ebullient Lord Capulet greets late-arriving guests. “*Welcome*, gentlemen! Ladies that have their toes unplaguèd with corns will have a bout with you!

“*Aha*, my mistresses! Which of you all will *now* deny to dance?—she that makes *dainty*, she I’ll swear hath *corns*!” he teases. “Am I come near ye now?” He beams at the ladies; slender rods support their stiff black masks, sparkling with beads, sequins, spangles and feathers.

Capulet urges more to come inside. “*Welcome*, gentlemen! I have seen the day that *I* have worn a mask, and could tell a whispering tale in a fair lady’s ear, such as would please!” He sighs. “’Tis gone, ’tis gone, ’tis gone.

“You are *welcome*, gentlemen!

“Come, musicians, *play*! The hall, the *hall*! Give room! And *foot* it, girls!”

Instruments are soon taken up and tuned; and as the music begins, Lady Capulet moves gracefully around the room, chatting cordially with the evening’s elegant revelers. Her bashful young daughter quietly follows.

“More *light*, you knaves!” calls jovial Lord Capulet, “and turn the tables up—and quench the fire; the room is grown too hot!”

He is surprised to see another tardy guest, his aging uncle: “*Ah*, sirrah, this unlooked-for sport comes *well*! Nay, sit, nay, *sit*, good cousin Capulet; for you and I are past our dancing days! How long is’t now since last yourself and I were in a mask?”

“By’r lady, thirty years.”

“*What*, man? ’Tis not so *much*, ’tis *not* so *much*!—’tis since the nuptials of Lucentio, come Pentecost as quickly as it will, some *five and twenty* years—and *then* we masked!”

“’Tis more, ’tis *more*—his *son* is older, sir: his son is *thirty*.”

“Will you *tell* me that? His son was but a ward *two* years ago!” And they continue so with their reminiscence.

Mercutio and the masked gentlemen with him—two Montague interlopers—have already mingled with the happy crowd, bent on enjoying the dancing.

Romeo, however—a mask covering his face, but not his eyes—has been standing transfixed. He asks a serving-man who is busily lighting candles at the sides of a large mirror, “What lady is that, who doth enrich the hand of yonder knight?”

“I know not, sir,” says the man, not stopping to look.

“Oh, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!” breathes Romeo. “It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night like a rich jewel in an Ethiope’s ear: beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear! So shows a snowy dove trooping with crows, as yonder lady o’er her fellows shows!”

The measure done, he thinks, I’ll watch her place of stand, and, touching hers, make blessed my rude hand!

Did my heart love till now? Forswear it, sight! For I ne’er saw true beauty till this night!

But not far away is the fiery, quick-tempered Tybalt—and he has overheard Romeo’s question to the servant.

“*This*, by his voice, should be a *Montague*! Fetch me my rapier, boy,” he tells his page, who quickly goes. “What?—*dares* the slave come hither, covered with an antic face, to flier and *scorn* at our solemnity? Now, by the stock and honour of my kin, to strike him dead I hold it not a sin!”

Lord Capulet sees his angry face. “Why, how *now*, kinsman! Wherefore storm you so?”

“Uncle, this is a *Montague*!—our *foe*, a *villain* that is hither come in spite, to scorn at our solemnity this night!”

Capulet is not alarmed. “Young Romeo is it?”

“’Tis *he*, that villain Romeo!”

“*Content* thee, gentle coz, let him alone,” says Capulet. “He bears him like a portly old gentleman; and, to say truth, Verona brags of him to be a virtuous and well-governed youth. I would not for the wealth of all the town here in my house do him disparagement! Therefore be patient; take no note of him.”

He sees that Tybalt is chafed. “It is my *will*—the which if thou respect, show a *fair* presence, and put off these frowns, an ill-beseeming semblance for a *feast*.”

But Tybalt glowers. “It *fits* when such a *villain* is a guest! I’ll not endure him!”

“He *shall* be endured!” Red-faced Capulet’s voice rises with indignation. “*What*, goodman boy? I say, he *shall*! Go *to*; am I the master here, or *you*? Go *to*!”

Mindful of his festive party, the nobleman lowers his voice to a menacing whisper. “*You’ll* not endure him—God shall mend my soul!—you’ll make a *mutiny* among my *guests*! *You* will set cock a-coop? *You’ll* be the man?”

“Why, uncle, ’tis a *shame*!” protests Tybalt.

“Go *to*, go *to*!—you are a saucy *boy*!” fumes Capulet. “Is’t *so*, indeed? I know what: you must *contrary* me! This trick may chance to scathe you!” His glare shifts quickly to a smile, as he turns to passing guests; he tells them, “Marry, ’tis *time*! Well *done*, my hearts!”

But then, in a heated hush, he tells Tybalt, “*You are a princox*! Go! Be *quiet*, or—”

Again, buoyantly, he shouts to the hall: “More light, more *light*!

“—for ‘shame’ I’ll *make* you quiet!”

Some guests now require Lord Capulet’s attention. “What, *cheerly*, my hearts!” He goes to them.

Tybalt seethes. *Choler meeting perforce with willful patience makes my flesh tremble in their different greeting!*

I will withdraw; but this intrusion, now seeming sweet, shall convert to bitter gall!

He stalks angrily from the room.

Romeo finds himself completely enchanted by Juliet—and drawn to her side. He says sweetly, taking her hand, “If I profane with my unworthiest hand this holy shrine, the gentle *fine* is this: my lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand to smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss!”

Juliet look up at the masked suitor, amused by the metaphor. “Good pilgrim, you do *wrong* your hand too much, which *mannerly* devotion shows in this!—for saints have hands that pilgrims’ hands do touch; and *palm*-to-palm is holy palmers’ kiss....” Pilgrims carry palm leaves as signs of devotion.

Romeo would prefer the fine. "Have not saints *lips*, and holy palmers, too?"

"Aye, pilgrim—lips that they must use in *prayer*."

"Oh, then, dear saint," says Romeo, "let lips do what hands do: they pray. *Grant* thou, lest faith turn to despair!"

She smiles softly. "Saints"—their statues—"do not *move*, though grant for prayers' sake...."

"Then move not, while *my* prayer's effect I take!" He leans forward and kisses her gently. "Thus from my lips, by yours my sin is purged."

Juliet is clearly pleased; but she pretends to protest: "Then have *my* lips the sin that they have took!"

"Take sin from thy lips?—oh, trespass sweetly urged! Give me my sin again!" He kisses her once more.

Juliet, eyes glittering, smiles—and teases: "You kiss by the book...."

He would happily respond to the challenge, but they are interrupted: the nurse comes to Juliet. "Madam, your mother craves a word with you."

With a longing glance back at Romeo, the girl goes.

Romeo asks the buxom nurse. "Who is her mother?"

"Marry, bachelor, her mother is *the lady of the house*, and a good lady, and a wise and virtuous! I nursed her daughter, that you talked withal. I tell you, he that can lay hold of *her* shall have the chinks!"

Is she a Capulet? Oh, costly account!—my life in my foe's debt!

Just then Benvolio grasps his shoulder; the party is ending. "Away, *begone!*—the sport is at the best!"

Romeo is still stunned. "*Aye*, so I fear; the more is my *unrest!*"

With the other guests, they move, still masked, toward the door, where Lord Capulet hospitably bids them pause. "*Nay*, gentlemen, prepare not to be *gone*; we have a trifling foolish *banquet* towards!"—after-supper fruit and wine.

"Is it e'en so?" he says, looking around and seeing that the guests are departing. "Why, then, I thank you *all!*—I *thank* you, honest gentlemen!

"*Good night!* More *torches* here!" he calls.

He turns to his wife. "Come on then, let's to bed.

"*Ah*, sirrah, by my faith, it waxes *late*," Capulet tells a weary serving-man. "I'll to my rest." He and Lady Capulet go up the stairs.

Juliet is watching the visitors as they leave. "Come hither, nurse," she says. "Who is yond gentleman?"

"The son and heir of old Tiberio."

"Who's he that now is going out of door?"

"Marry, that, I think, be young Petruccio."

"Who's he that follows there, that would not dance?"

The nurse turns away, frowning. "I know not."

"Go ask his name!" pleads Juliet. "If he be married, my *grave* is likely to be *my* wedding bed!"

"His name is Romeo—and *Montague*, the only son of your great enemy!"

"My only *love* sprung from my only *hate!* Too early seen unknown, and known too late! Ominous birth of love it is to me that I must love a loathed enemy!"

The nurse is alarmed. "What's this? What's *this?*"

Juliet quickly covers: "A *rhyme* I learned even now, from one I danced withal."

Lady Montague summons from above, on the stairs: "Juliet!"

"Anon, *anon!*" calls the nurse. "Come, let's away; the strangers all are gone."

Chapter Four New Commitments

The Prologue returns. “Now old Desire doth in his death-bed lie—and young *Affection* gapes to be his heir!

“That fair which love groaned and would die for, with tender *Juliet* comparèd is now *not* fair! Now Romeo is *belovèd*, and loves *again*!

“Alike they’re betwitched by the charms of looks. But to his *foes* opposèd must he complain!—and *she* steal love’s sweet bait from fearful hooks!

“Being held a foe, he may not have access to breathe such vows as lovers use to swear—and she, as much in love, has means much less to meet her new-belovèd any where.

“But passion lends them power, time the means to meet, tempering extremities with extreme sweet....”

Romeo has hurried, alone, into a dark, narrow lane beside the mansion—for concealment. *Can I go forward, when my heart is here? Turn back, dull earth, and find thy centre out!*

Standing on tiptoe, hands pressed against a high wall of craggy stones, he stares across the yard behind Lord Capulet’s house, intently watching the windows of candle-lit rooms above in desperate hope of glimpsing Juliet.

Impulsively, he climbs to the top of the wall, then leaps down to move quickly among the fragrant apple trees.

Benvolio and Mercutio, too, are out under the stars in the waning night, in search, now, of their missing companion. From the street they come down a lane to pause beside an old stone wall.

“*Romeo!*” calls Benvolio. “My cousin *Romeo!*”

Mercutio yawns. “He is wise, and, on my life, hath stol’n him home to bed.”

Benvolio shakes his head. “He *ran* this way—and leaped this orchard wall! *Call*, good Mercutio....”

“*Aye*. And I’ll *conjure* too!” says the older man. “*Romeo! Mood’s madman! Passion’s lover! Appear* thou—in the likeness of a *sigh!* Speak but one *rhyme*, and I am satisfied! Cry but ‘*Ay, me!*’—pronounce but ‘love’ and ‘dove’—speak to thy gossip *Venus*, young Adam, one fair word, one nick-name for her purblind son and heir: *Cupid!*” He adds, dryly, “He that shot so trim when King Cophetua loved the *beggar-maid!*”—as told in a well known ballad.

The mockery draws no response; except for crickets’ chirping, the lane and orchard are silent. “He heareth not, he stirreth not, he moveth not,” says Mercutio, hardly surprised. “The ape is *dead*, so I must *conjure* him!

“I conjure thee—by *Rosaline’s* bright eyes,” he cries mischievously, “by her high forehead and her scarlet lip, by her fine foot, straight leg, and *quivering thigh*, and the demesnes that there *adjacent* lie!—that in thy likeness thou *appear* to us!”

Says Benvolio uneasily, “If he *hear* thee, thou wilt anger him!”

“That cannot anger him. Twould *anger* him to raise *in his mistress’ circle* a spirit of some strange nature—letting it there *stand* till she had *laid* it and conjured it *down!*” he says, lasciviously and loudly. “*This* were some *spite!*”

“*My* invocation was fair and honest, when in his mistress’ name I conjured only but to raise up *him.*”

“Come,” says Benvolio, “he hath hid himself among these trees to be comported with the temper of night: *blind* is his love, and best *befits* the dark!”

“If lover be blind, love cannot *hit the mark!*” says Mercutio, in specious concern regarding his coarse meaning. He shakes his head sadly. “Now will he sit under a tree and wish his mistress were that kind of fruit which maids call *medlars*,”—soft, moist and darkly ripe, “when they laugh alone”—among themselves, with no man about.

“*Romeo*,” he calls, “*oh*, that she *were*—that she *were* an ‘*open arse*,’”—one crude term for medlar, “and *thou* a popp’rin’ *pear!*” But not even the bawdy play on *pair* provokes a response.

“*Romeo*, good *night!*” laughs Mercutio. “I’ll to my truckle-bed; this field-bed is too *cold* for *me* to sleep in!

“Come, shall we go?” he asks Benvolio.

The younger man nods. “Go, then. For ’tis in vain to seek him here that *means not to be found!*” he says, loudly enough to be heard over the wall.

Beyond, in the dark orchard, an aching heart responds, silently, to the libertine’s taunts: *He jests at scars that never felt a wound!*

Romeo looks up just as Juliet comes into view at the balustered rail outside her upstairs bedroom. *But, soft! What light through yonder window breaks? It is the east, and Juliet is the sun! Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon, who is already sick and pale with grief, that thou her maid art far more fair than she!*

Be not her maid, since she is envious; her vestal livery is but sick and green, and none but fools do wear it! Cast it off!

It is my lady! Oh, it is my love! Oh, that she knew she were!

She speaks, yet she says nothing. What of that?—her eye discourses! I will answer it!

But he stops. *I am too bold; ’tis not to me she speaks: two of the fairest stars in all the heavens, having some business, do entreat her eyes to twinkle in their spheres till they return!*

What if her eyes were there, and those stars in her head? The brightness of her cheek would shame the stars, as daylight doth a lamp!

Her eyes in heaven would through the airy region stream down so bright that birds would sing, and think it were not night!

See how she leans her cheek upon her hand! Oh, that I were a glove upon that hand, that I might touch that cheek!

Juliet, above, is relieved to be away from her mother and nurse, alone with her feelings. “*Ay, me!*”

She speaks! Oh, speak again, bright angel!—for thou art as glorious, compared to this night-being o’er my head—he means the moon, as is a white-wingèd messenger of heaven unto the upturnèd, wondering eyes of mortals, who fall back to gaze on him when he bestrides the lazy-pacing clouds, and sails upon the bosom of the air!

She whispers, unheard, she thinks, staring into the warm night, “*O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou ‘Romeo’?—deny thy father and refuse thy name!—or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love, and I’ll no longer be a Capulet!*”

He listens, delighted. *Shall I speak at this, or shall I hear more?*

“’Tis but thy *name* that is my enemy! Thou art *thysself*, though, not a *Montague!* What’s ‘*Montague*’?—it is not *hand*, nor foot, nor arm, nor face, nor any other part belonging to a man. Oh, be some *other* name!

“What’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet! Were he not *Romeo* callèd, so *Romeo* would retain that dear perfection which he owns aside from that title! *Romeo*, *doff* thy name!—and *for* that name, which is no part of thee, take *all of my self!*”

He calls up to her, softly: “I take thee at thy word! Call me but ‘*love*,’ and I’ll be new baptizèd!—henceforth will I never be ‘*Romeo*!’”

She looks down, startled. “What man art *thou*, that thus bescreenèd in night so stumblest on my counsel?”

“By a *name*, I know not how to tell thee who I am! My name, dear saint, is *hateful* to myself, because it is an enemy to *thee!*—had I it *written* I would *tear* the word!”

“My ears have not yet drunk a hundred words of that tongue’s utterance,” says she, “yet I know the sound! Art thou not *Romeo?*—and a *Montague?*”

“*Neither*, fair saint, if either thou dislike!”

Juliet, apprehensive now, glances back into the house. “How camest thou *hither*, tell me, and *wherefore?* The orchard walls are high and hard to climb—and this place is *death*, considering who thou art, if any of my kinsmen find thee here!”

“With *Love’s* light wings did I o’er-perch these walls, for stony limits cannot hold Love out; and what love can’t *do*, that dares love *attempt!* Therefore thy kinsmen are no stop to me!”

She warns, urgently, “If they do *see* thee they will *murder* thee!”

“Alack, there lies more peril in *thine eye* than twenty of their *swords*; look thou but *sweet*, and I am proof against their enmity!”

“I would not for the world they saw thee here!”

“I have night’s cloak to hide me from their sight. And unless thou love me, *let* them find me here! My life were better *ended* by their hate than my death *postponèd*, wanting of thy love!”

Juliet looks into the house again, then back down. “By whose direction found’st thou out this place?”

“By Love, who first did prompt me to inquire! He lent me counsel, and I lent him *eyes!*—I am no captain, but wert thou as far away as that vast shore washèd with the *farthest* sea, I would adventure for such merchandise!”

She moves forward. “Thou know’st the mask of night is on my face, else would a maiden *blush* bepaint my cheek for that which thou hast heard me speak tonight!

“Fain would I dwell on *form!*—fain, *fain* deny what I have spoke— But *farewell*, complying! *Dost thou love me?*”

“I know thou wilt say ‘Aye,’ and I will take thy word. But if thou *swarest*, thou mayst prove *false!*—at lovers’ perjuries they say Love *laughs*.”

“O gentle Romeo, if thou dost love, *pronounce* it—faithfully!

“If thou think’st I am too quickly won, I’ll frown, and be perverse, and say thee ‘*Nay*,’ so thou wilt woo—but else, *not for the world!* In truth, fair Montague, I am too fond, and therefore thou mayst think my ’havior light—but trust me, gentleman, I’ll prove more true than those that have more cunning to be strange!

“I would have been more strange, I must confess, but that thou overheard’st, ere I was ’ware, my true love’s passion. Therefore pardon me, and do not impute this yielding to light love, which the dark night hath so discoverèd!”

Romeo is delighted. “Lady, by yonder blessèd moon I swear, that tips with silver all these fruit-tree tops—”

“Oh, swear not by the *moon!*—the inconstant moon, that monthly *changes* in her circled orb,” pleads Juliet, “lest that thy love prove likewise variable!”

“What shall I swear by?”

“Do not swear *at all!*—or, if thou wilt, swear by thy gracious *self*, which is the god of *my* idolatry, and I’ll believe thee.”

“If ever my heart’s dear love—”

“*Well*. Do not swear.” Too many stories, read and heard, have exposed lovers’ commonplaces.

She peers down among the trees’ dim shapes. “Although I joy in *thee*, I have no joy of this contract tonight!—it is too *rash*, too unadvisèd, too sudden!—too like the *lightning*, which doth cease to be ere one can say ‘It lightens!’

“Sweet, *good night!* This bud of love by summer’s ripening breath may prove a beauteous flower when next we meet!

“Good night, *good night!* As sweet repose and rest come to thy heart as are within my breast!”

He calls up to her: “Oh, wilt thou leave me so unsatisfied?”

“What satisfaction canst thou have *tonight?*”

“The exchange of thy love’s faithful *vow* for mine!”

“I *gave* thee mine before thou didst request it,” she replies. “And I would it were yet to give.”

“Wouldst thou *withdraw* it?—for what purpose, love?”

“Only, to be frank, to *give* it thee *again!* But I *wish for* a thing I *have*: my bounty is as boundless as the sea, my love as deep: the more I give to *thee*, the more I have, for both are infinite!”

She looks behind her, startled. “I hear some noise within!—dear love, *adieu!*” She calls into the house, “*Anon*, good nurse!” Juliet leans forward against the railing. “Sweet Montague, be true! Stay but a little... I will come again!” She goes inside.

O blessèd, blessèd night! thinks Romeo. *I am afeard, it being night, that all this is but a dream, too pleasingly sweet to be substantial!*

Juliet returns. “These words, dear Romeo, then *good night* indeed: if that thy bent of love be *honourable*, thy purpose *marriage*, send me word tomorrow, by one whom I’ll prepare to come to thee, where and what time thou wilt perform the rite!

“And all my fortunes at thy foot I’ll lay, and follow thee, my lord, throughout the world!”

The nurse’s voice calls, “*Madam....*”

Juliet turns away briefly. “I come *anon!*” She looks down. “But if thou mean’st not well, I do *beseech* thee—”

“*Madam!*”

“By and *by!* I *come!*”

“—to cease thy suit, and leave me to my longing! Tomorrow will I send!”

“So thrives my *soul!*” says Romeo.

“A thousand times *good night!*” She goes inside.

A thousand times the worse, to lack thy light! thinks Romeo. *Love goes toward love as schoolboys from their books; but love from love as toward school, with heavy looks!*

Just as he’s leaving, Juliet returns. “Romeo...” she calls softly. “Oh for a *falconer’s* voice, to lure this peregrine gently back again! Bondage is hoarse, and may not speak aloud, else would I tear open the cave where Echo lies, and make *her* airy tongue more hoarse than mine with repetition of my Romeo’s name!”

He smiles. *It is my soul that calls upon my name!* “How silvery sweet sound lovers’ tongues by night!—like softest music to attending ears!”

“Romeo...” she whispers.

“My dear!”

“At what o’clock shall I send to thee?”

“At the hour of *nine.*”

“I will not fail!” she vows. “’Tis *twenty years* till then!” She glances into the house, flustered. “I have forgot why I did call thee back...”

“Let me stand here till thou remember it!”

“I shall *forget*, having thee still stand there, in remembering how I love thy company!”

“I’ll stay *forever*—to *have* thee ever forget, forgetting any other home but this!”

“’Tis almost *morning!*” she frets. “I would have thee *gone*—and yet no further than a wanton woman’s bird: she lets it hop away a little from her hand, like a poor prisoner in its twisted fetters, then with the silk thread plucks it *back* again, so lovingly jealous of its liberty!”

“I would I *were* thy bird!”

“Sweet, so would I, but that I should kill thee with so much *cherishing!* Good night, *good night!* Parting is such *sweet* sorrow that I shall say good-*night* till it be *morrow!*” But she gently closes the tall window.

“Sleep dwell upon thine eyes, peace in thy breast!” he murmurs. “Would *I* were Sleep and Peace, so sweetly to rest!”

But now he has much to do—a marriage to arrange, with his priest.

Hence will I to my ghostly father’s cell, his help to crave—and my dear hap to tell!

Just before daybreak, Friar Laurence returns to his spare quarters, dim and cool within the stone monastery, carrying a wicker basket of freshly picked herbs and blooms to be used in blending his healing salves and potions.

The grey-eyed morn smiles on the frowning night, thinks the Franciscan, chastening the eastern clouds with streaks of light; and fleckèd darkness like a drunkard reels from forth day’s path and Titan’s fiery wheels! Now, ere the sun advance his burning eye, the day to cheer and night’s dank dew to dry, I must up-fill this osier-cage of ours with baleful weeds and precious-juicèd flowers.

The earth that’s Nature’s mother is her tomb; what is her burying grave, that is her womb. And from her womb we children of divers kind, sucking on her natural bosom find many of her many verdures excellent—none but for some—and yet all different!

Oh, mighty is the powerful grace that lies in herbs and plants, stored in their true qualities! For nought is so vile that on the earth doth live but to the earth some special good doth give; nor aught so good but that, restrained from that fair use, revolts from true birth, stumbling on abuse.

Virtue itself turns vice, being misapplied; and vice sometimes by action is dignified.

He examines a sample of his pre-dawn gathering. *Within the infant rind of this small flower, poison hath residence—and medicinal power: for this, being smelt, with that part cheers each part; being tasted, slays all senses, with the heart! Two such opposèd kings encamp them still, in man as well as herbs: grace, and rude will. And where the worsèd is predominant, full soon the canker death eats up that plant.*

Romeo, knocks on the open door, and says, politely, as he enters. “Good morrow, Father!”

“*Benedicite!*” The monk smiles. “What early tongue so sweet saluteth me? Young son, it argues a distempered head, so soon to bid good morrow to thy bed!

“*Care keeps his watch in every old man’s eye,
And where care lodges, sleep will never lie;
But where unbruised youth with unstuffed brain
Doth couch his limbs, there golden sleep doth reign.*”

“Therefore thy earliness doth me assure thou art up-roused by some distemperature,” he says, beginning to sort the medicinal greens on a bare-wood table. “Or if not so, then *here* I hit it right: our Romeo hath not been *in bed* tonight...”

Romeo beams. “That last is true; a *sweeter* rest was mine!”

Friar Laurence looks up, concerned. “God pardon *sin!*—wast thou with *Rosaline?*”

“With *Rosaline*, my ghostly father?—*no!* I have forgot that name, and that name’s woe!”

“That’s *good*, my son! But where hast thou been, then?”

“I’ll tell thee ere thou ask it me again: I have been feasting with mine *enemies!*—where, on a sudden, one hath *wounded* me that’s by me wounded! Both our remedies within thy help and holy physic lie! I bear no hatred, blessèd man—for, *lo, my* intercession”—prayer for help—“likewise steads my *foe!*”

The priest regards his parishioner. “Be *plain*, good son, and homely in thy drift; riddling confession finds but middling shrift.”

“Then plainly know: my heart’s dear love is set on the fair daughter of rich Capulet! As mine on hers, so hers is set on mine, in all combinèd—save what *thou* must combine, by holy *marriage!*

“When and where and how we met, we wooed, and made exchange of vows I’ll tell thee as we pass; but this I pray: that thou consent to *marry* us today!”

“Holy Saint *Francis!*” exclaims the good monk, “what a change is *here!* Is Rosaline, whom thou didst love so dear, so soon forsaken? Young men’s love then lies not truly in their hearts but in their eyes!

“Jesu Maria, what a deal of *brine* hath washed thy sallow cheeks for Rosaline!—how much salt water thrown away in waste, to season a love that of it doth not taste! The sun not yet thy *sighs* from heaven clears! Thy old groans ring *yet* in my ancient ear! *Lo*, here upon thy cheek the stain doth set of an old tear that is not washed off yet!

“If e’er thou wast thyself and these woes thine, thou and those woes were all for *Rosaline!* Then art thou *exchangèd?*” He wags his head in mock astonishment. “Pronounce this sentence, then: ‘*Women* may fall, when there’s no strength in *men!*’”—an aphorism with a ribald second meaning.

“Thou *chided* me *oft* for loving Rosaline!” the lad points out.

“For *doting*, not for loving, pupil mine.”

“And badest me *bury* love.”

“Not to lay *one* in a grave, another, *out*, to have!”

“I pray thee, chide not Romeo! She whom I love now doth *grace* for grace and *love* for love allow; the other did not so!”

The monk smiles; Rosaline, older, widely sought and beseeched, has ignored Romeo. “Oh, she knew well: thy love did read by *rote* and could not *spell!*” he laughs. “But come, young waverer, come, go with me.

“In one respect I’d thy assistant be,” says the priest, “for this alliance may so happy prove as to turn your households’ rancour pure, to *love.*”

“Oh, let us hence!” urges Romeo. “I stand on sudden haste!”

“Wisely and slow,” Laurence advises. “They stumble that run fast.”

Chapter Five Appointments

Amid the late-morning throngs moving along Verona’s the busy thoroughfares, two young noblemen meet to resume their search.

“Where the devil should this Romeo be?” asks Mercutio, as they scan the avenue. “Came he not home last night?”

“Not to his father’s; I spoke with his man.”

“*Ay*, that same pale, hard-hearted wench, that Rosaline, *torments* him so that he will surely run mad!”

Benvolio has learned of a more serious threat to Romeo. “*Tybalt*, the kinsman of old Capulet, hath sent a letter to his father’s house—”

“*A challenge*, on my life!”

Benvolio is worried: “Romeo will answer it.”

“Any man that can *write* may answer a *letter.*”

“Nay, he will answer the letter’s *master*—now he dares, being *dared!*”

Mercutio, too, is concerned; but in his fashion, he must gibe. “Alas poor Romeo—he is *already dead!*—*stabbed*, with a white wench’s dark eye!—*shot*, through the ear with a love-song!—the very pain of his heart *cleft* by the blind bow-boy’s butt-shaft!”—Cupid’s arrow. He frowns. “And is *he* a man to encounter *Tybalt?*”

“Why, what is *Tybalt?*” asks Benvolio disdainfully.

The debonair city-dweller knows him well. “More than a *prince of cats*,”—favorite of ladies, “I can tell you!

“Oh, he is the courageous *captain of complements!*”—*intervals*, music’s subtly matched tones. “He *fights* as you’d sing a *prick*-song!—keeps *time*, *distance*, and *proportion*; *rests* for his

minim: rest... one... two... —and the *third* in your *bosom!*—the very *butcher* of the silk's *button!*

“He duels as a ‘*duelist*,’ a gentleman of the ‘*very*’ first house, on the ‘first’ and ‘second *cause!*’”—by formal rules. Mercutio simulates swinging a sword: “*Ah*, the immortal *passado!* The *punto reverso!* The *hai!*”

“The what?” Benvolio is unfamiliar with terms used by experts in fencing.

Mercutio further derides Tybalt—for shallow foppishness: “The *pox* on such antic, lispings, affecting *fantasticoes*, these new *tuners* of *accents!* ‘By Jesu, a *very* good blade!’” he says, mocking as he mimics. “‘A *very* tall man!’ ‘A *very* good whore!’”

“Why, is not this a lamentable thing, grandsire,” he complains to the reserved youth, “that we should be thus afflicted with these strange *flies?*—these *fashion*-mongers, these *pardon-me*’s who stand so much on the new *French* that they cannot sit at ease on the old *bench!* Oh, their *bon*’s!—their *bones!*”

But the rant is cut short: “Here comes Romeo!” cries Benvolio, pointing.

“*Without* his ‘*Ro*,’ like a dried herring!”—its roe removed, says Mercutio wryly. “Flesh, *flesh*, how art thou *fishified!*”

Believing that Romeo is still smitten with Rosaline, Mercutio alludes to poets’ celebrated muses: “Now is he for the numbers”—sonnet lines—“that *Petrarch* flowed in! Laura, compared to *his* lady, was but a *kitchen-wench!* Marry, she had a better lover to be-*rhyme* her. Dido: a *dowdy!* Cleopatra: a *gipsy!* Helen and Hero, *hildings* and *harlots!* Thisbe—a grey *eye* or so, but nought to the *purpose!*”—no feature arousing men’s lust.

“Signior Romeo, *Bon jour!*—there’s a French salutation to your French *slops!*” he teases, eyeing the young man’s dapper breeches. “You gave us the counter feint fairly last night!”

“Good morrow to you both! What counterfeit did I give you?”

“The *slip*, sir—the *slip!*—can you not conceive?”

“*Pardon*, good Mercutio! My business was great,” says Romeo humbly, “and in such a case as mine, a man may strain courtesy.”

Mercutio is always ready for jesting, and he engages in that sport now. But after a brief exchange of topical cleverness with Romeo, he pleads, laughing: “Come *between* us, good Benvolio!—my wits *faint!*”

Romeo calls for more, and faster: “*Switch and spurs!*—*switch* and *spurs*, or I’ll cry the *match!*”—declare a win.

“Nay, if thy wits run the wild-goose chase, I have *done!*” Mercutio tells him, “for thou hast more of the wild in *one* of thy wits than, I am sure, I have in my whole *five!* Was I *with* you there for the *goose?*”—at the end.

“Thou wast never with me for *anything* when thou wast not there for the *goose!*”—a female.

Mercutio laughs, pleased to see his friend happy again. “Why, is not *this* better, now, than *groaning* for love? Now art thou *sociable*, now art thou *Romeo!*—now art thou what thou art, by *art* as well as by nature! For this driveling *love* is like a great natural”—dunce—“that runs lolling up and down to hide his *bauble* in a *hole!*”

“Stop there, stop *there!*” says Benvolio, anticipating a slide into bawdry.

“Thou desirest me to stop my tale *against the hair!*”—at the crucial moment, protests Mercutio.

Benvolio grins. “Thou wouldst else have made the tale *large!*”—the *tail* pregnant.

“Oh, thou art *deceived,*” counters Mercutio. “I would have made *me short!*—for I was *come* unto the whole *depth* of my tale, and meant, indeed, to occupy the argument no *longer!*”

As he and his companions laugh, Romeo sees Peter coming toward them with Juliet’s nurse. “Here’s goodly pair!”

Mercutio notes the nurse’s abundant bosom and ample dress. “*Assail*—a sail!”

“*Two,*” says Benvolio. “Two—a skirt and a smock.”

The nurse, approaching, prepares for social intercourse. “Peter.”

Slowed by the heat, he is just catching up. “Anon....”

“My *fan*, Peter!”

Mercutio mutters: “Good Peter, do hide her apace—her *fan*’s the *fairer* face!”

The nurse addresses the gallants. “God ’ye”—grant you—“good morrow, gentlemen.”

Mercutio replies, with a courtly bow, “God ’ye good *den*, fair gentlewoman!” *Gooden* is short for *good evening*—but the rascal’s *den* suggests *cavern*.

She thinks it’s still morning. “Is it a gooden?”

He takes that as a *good one*. “’Tis no *less*, I tell you,” says Mercutio, with an added play on *any earlier*. “For the bawdy *hand* of *this dial*”—he motions toward his codpiece—“is now upon the *prick*”—tick mark—“of noon!”—pointed upward.

“*Out* upon you!” she cries at the rude jest. “What a man are *you*?”

Romeo shakes his head, but laughs in spite of himself. “One, gentlewoman, that God hath made for Himself to *mar*!”

The nurse nods: “By my troth, it is *well said*!—‘for *himself* to mar’ quoth ’a! Gentlemen, can any of you tell me where I may find the young Romeo?” she asks, with an ambassador’s guile.

“I can tell you,” says he. “Although ‘young Romeo’ will be older when you have found him than he was when you sought him, I am the youngest of that name, avoiding a worse one.”

She smiles, amused. “You say well.”

“Yea—if ‘a worse’ is *well*!” scoffs Mercutio. “Very well *took*, i’ faith—wisely, *wisely*!”

“If you be *he*, sir,” she tells Romeo, “I desire some *confidance* with you.” She means she has something to confide.

Benvolio is tickled: “She will *indict* him to some *supper*!”

Lusty Mercutio takes that fictive offer as crude: “A *bawd*, a *bawd*, a *bawd*! *So ho*!” The cry is a hunter’s.

“What hast thou found?” demands Romeo of the high-spirited huntsman.

“No *hare*, sir,” says Mercutio, “unless a *hair*, sir, in a Lenten *pie* that is somewhat stale and hoar ere it be spent!” *Stale* and *whore* can be synonyms. He sings—lewdly—of moldy fare:

“*An old hare, hoar,
And an old-hair whore
Are very good meat—in Lent!
But a whore that is sore
Is too much by a score,
And it hoars ere it be spent!*”

Speaking of rabbit has aroused his appetite for the noon meal. “Romeo, will you come to your father’s? We’ll to dinner, thither....”

Romeo nods. “I will follow you.”

“*Fare well, ancient lady, fare well,*” sings Mercutio to the nurse. “*Lady, lady, laid-he!*” He leads much-abashed Benvolio toward the stately home of Lord Montague.

“Marry, farewell!” calls the nurse—who has been fascinated by Mercutio. She watches him admiringly, then asks Romeo, “I pray you, sir, what saucy *merchant* was this, that was so full of his ropery?”—clever wording.

“A gentleman, Nurse, that loves to hear himself *talk*, and will speak more in a *minute* than he will *stand to* in a month!”

“An ’a speak any thing against *me*,” says she, with ladylike indignation—despite the fact that *thing* can mean *penis*, “I’ll take him *down*, even if ’a were lustier than he is, and *twenty* such Jacks!” Romeo suppresses a grin. “And if *I* cannot, I’ll find those that *shall*! *Scurvy knave*! I am none of his *flirt-gills*; I am none of his *skein-mates*!” She turns to scowl at Peter, her devoted suitor. “And thou must *stand by* too, and suffer every knave to use me at his pleasure!”

"I saw no man use you at *pleasure*," protests her Peter. "If I had, my weapon should quickly have been *out*, I warrant you! I dare draw as soon as another man, if I see occasion in a good quarrel, and the law on my side!"

"Now, afore God, I am so vexed that every part about me *quivers!*" says the nurse. "Scurvy knave!"

But she turns to Romeo. "Pray you, sir, a word." She draws him aside. "As I told you, my young lady bade me inquire you out.

"What she bade me say, I will not keep to myself; but first let *me* tell ye: if ye should lead her into a fool's paradise, as they say, it were a very *gross* kind of behavior!" Her tone softens, almost to pleading: "For the gentlewoman is *young*; and, therefore, if you should deal double with her, truly it were an ill thing to be offered to any gentlewoman—and very weak dealing!"

Romeo touches her hand. "Nurse, commend me to thy lady and mistress," he says earnestly. "I protest unto thee—"

"Good heart, and i' faith!" cries the nurse, "I will *tell* her as much! Lord, *Lord*, she will be a joyful woman!"

Romeo is pleased—but wary: "*What* wilt thou tell her, Nurse? Thou dost not note my—"

"I will tell her, sir, that you do *protest!*—which, as I take it, is a *gentlemanlike* offer!"

Romeo accepts her synonym for *propose*. "Bid her devise some means to come to *shrift* this afternoon. At Friar Laurence' cell shall she be shrived—and there be *married!*" He offers her a gold coin. "Here is for thy pains."

"No, truly sir; not a penny."

"Go to; I say you shall!"

The nurse takes it. "This afternoon, sir! *Well!*—she shall be there!"

"And wait, good nurse, behind the abbey wall; within this hour my man shall be with thee, and bring thee *CORDS* made like a tackle *stair*, which to the high top-gallant of my joy must be my conveyance in this secret night.

"Farewell! Be trusty, and I'll requite thy pains! *Farewell!* Commend me to thy mistress!"

"Now God in heaven *BLESS* thee!" says the nurse. But she pauses. "Hark you, sir...."

"What say'st thou, my dear nurse?"

"Is your man secret? Did you ne'er hear say, 'Two may keep counsel—putting *one* away'?"—if one is subtracted.

"I warrant thee, my man's as true as steel."

"Well, sir, my mistress is the sweetest lady—Lord, Lord! When 'twas a little prating thing— She is troubled by one main concern. "Oh, there is a nobleman in town, one Paris, that would fain 'lay knife aboard'"—sup regularly at Juliet's household. "But *she*, good soul, had as lief see a toad, a very *toad*, as see him! Sometimes when she's upset I'll tell her that Paris is a proper man; but, I warrant you, when I say so, she looks as pale as any cloth in the virginal world!"—menstrual pad. The woman shakes her head, laughing.

She pauses for a moment, trying to recall something important she meant to add. "Doth not *rosemary* and *Romeo* begin both with one letter?" The herb signifies *remembrance*.

"Aye, Nurse. Both with an *R*. What of that?"

"*Ah, mock R! That's* the dog's name!"—*Mocker*. She looks down, thinking. "*R* is for the... no...." She frowns. "I know it begins...." She shrugs. "With some *other* letter."

The nurse returns to R. "But she hath the prettiest sententious for *it*—of *you* and *rosemary*, that would do you good to *hear!*" The fact that Juliet's parents intend to marry her to the count remains unremembered.

The attentive young man feels rewarded to hear about Juliet's sentences; he smiles. "Commend me to thy lady."

"Aye, a thousand times!" She looks around. "Peter!"

He has been watching the pigeons. "Anon."

"Peter, take my fan," she says imperiously, "and go before—and *apace!*"

Close by her family's ancestral mansion, Juliet waits impatiently in the dappled shade of the Capulet garden. *The clock struck nine when I did send the nurse; she promised to return in half an hour!*

She paces, fretting. *Perchance she cannot meet him!* Juliet she shakes her head: *That's not so.*

Oh, she is lame!—love's heralds should be thoughts, which ten times faster glide than the sun's beams driving back shadows over louring hills! Therefore do nimble-pinioned doves draw love—and therefore hath the wind-swift Cupid wings!

Now is the sun upon the highmost hill of this day's journey, and from nine till twelve is three long hours, yet she is not come! Had she affections, and warm, youthful blood, she would be as swift in motion as a ball: my words would bandy her to my sweet love, and his to me! But old folks may feign as they were lead!—unwieldy, slow, heavy and pale as dead!

Oh, God, *she comes!*

The nurse and Peter arrive at the front.

"O honey nurse, what *news*? Hast thou met with him? Send thy man away!"

The nurse nods. "Peter, stay at the gate." He goes back there to wait.

"Now, good, sweet nurse— Oh, Lord, why look'st thou *sad*? Though news be sad, yet *tell* them *merrily*; if good, thou shamest the music of sweet news by playing it to me with so sour a face!"

The woman of twenty-six edges past her. "I am a-weary! Give me leave awhile. Fie, how my bones ache! What a jaunt have I had!"

"I would thou hadst *my* bones, and I thy *news*! Nay, come, I pray thee, *speak!*—good, good nurse, *speak!*"

"Jesu, what *haste!* Can you not stay a while? Do you not see that I am out of breath?"

"How art thou out of breath when thou hast breath to *say* to me that thou art out of breath?" demands Juliet. "The *excuse* that thou dost make in this delay is longer than the *tale* thou dost excuse! Is thy news good, or bad—*answer* to that! Say either, and I'll wait for the circumstance! Let me be satisfied: is't good or bad?"

"Well, you have made a *simple* choice; you know not how to choose a *man!*

"*Romeo*?" She shakes her head. "No, not *he!*—although his face be better than *any* man's, yet his leg excels *all* men's! And as for a hand, and a foot, and a body, though they be not to be talked on, yet they are *past compare!* He is not a 'flower' of courtesy, but I'll warrant him as *gentle* as a *lamb!*

"Go thy ways, wench; serve God," she concludes. She yawns. "What, have you *dined*, at home?"

"No, *no!* But all this did I know *before!* What says he of our *marriage?* What of *that?*"

"*Lord*, how my head *aches,*" moans the nurse, "what a *head* have I! It beats as if it would fall in twenty pieces! *My back,*" she whines; Juliet hastens to rub her back. "O' t' other side— Oh, my back, my *back!* Beshrew your heart for sending me about, to catch my death with jaunting up and down!"

"I' faith I *am* sorry that thou art not well!" moans desperate Juliet. Then she pleads: "Sweet, sweet, sweet nurse, *tell me!* What *says* my love?"

"Your love says, like an honest gentleman, and a courteous, and a kind, and a handsome, and, I warrant, a virtuous— Where is your mother?"

"Where is *my mother?* Why, she is within; where should she be? How oddly thou repliest! 'Your love says, like an honest gentleman, '*Where is your mother?*'"

"*Oh, God's Lady*, dear!—are you so *eager?*" She shifts her back. "Marry, come *up*, I trow!" But Juliet backs away. "Is *this* the poultice for my aching bones? Henceforward do your messages yourself!"

"Here's such a *coil!*" cries Juliet in frustration. "Come, *what says Romeo?*" she insists.

The nurse's eyes twinkle. "Have you got leave to go to shrift today?"

“I have.”

“Then hie you hence to Friar Laurence’ cell; there stays a husband to make you a wife!” She smiles. “*Now* comes the wanton blood up in your cheeks!—they’ll be in *scarlet* straight, at any *muse!*”

“Hie you to church! I must go another way, to fetch a ladder, by the which your love must climb to a bird’s nest when it is dark.

“I am the drudge, and toil in your delight, but *you* shall bear the burden soon at *night!*” grins the nurse.

“*Go!* I’ll to lunch. Hie you to the cell.”

“I hie to *high fortune!* Honest nurse, farewell!” cries Juliet, already hurrying out at the gate, and away past puzzled Peter.

The golden sunshine encourages Friar Laurence, the would-be peacemaker, as he and Romeo stand outside the cowled monk’s quarters. Says he, in benediction, “May the heavens so smile upon this holy act that after hours chide us not with sorrow.”

“Amen, *amen!*” says Romeo, happily. “But come what sorrow can, it cannot countervail the exchange of joy that one short *minute* gives me in her sight! Do thou but close our hands with holy words; then love-devouring Death may do what he dare!—it is enough that I but *call her mine!*”

“These violent *delights* have violent *ends,*” the practical priest cautions, “and in their triumph die—like *fire* and *gunpowder* which as they kiss *consume!* The *sweetest* honey can annoy in its long deliciousness, and the *taste* confound the *appetite!*”

“Therefore love *moderately;* long love doth so. Too *swift* arrives as tardy as too *slow.*”

He smiles. “Here comes the lady.” Juliet seems almost to dance as she hurries along the path of flat, dark stone from the monastery gate. “Oh, so light a foot will ne’er wear out the everlasting flint! A *lover* may bestride the gossamer that idles in the wanton summer air, and yet not fall, so light is wishfulness!”

“*Good even* to my ghostly confessor!” says Juliet, scant of breath, her cheeks rosy.

“Romeo shall thank thee, daughter, for us both!”

Romeo kisses her, and Juliet beams. “As much to *him,* lest is his thanks too much!” She returns the kiss.

“*Ah,* Juliet,” says the blissful young man, “if the measure of thy joy be heaped like *mine,* and if thy skill be more to *blazon* it, then sweeten with breath this neighbour air, and let thy rich muse’s tongue unfold the unimagined happiness that we both receive from either in this dear encounter!”

“Conceptions more rich in *matter* than in words boast of their *substance,* not of ornament,” says she. “They are but beggars who can *count* their worth; but my true love is grown to such *excess* I cannot sum up *half* my wealth!”

“Come, come with me, and we will make short work,” says Friar Laurence. “For, by your leaves, you shall not stay *alone* till the Holy Church incorporate two in one!”

Chapter Six *Alla stoccata*

Mercutio, with Benvolio and their two young pages, dallies in one of thriving Verona’s busy public squares.

Benvolio is apprehensive. “I pray thee, good Mercutio, let’s retire. The day is hot, the Capulets abroad, and if we meet we shall not ’scape a brawl; for now, these hot days, is the bad blood stirring.”

Mercutio laughs. “Thou art like one of those fellows that, when he enters the confines of a tavern, claps his sword upon the table and says ‘God send me no need of thee!’—and by the operation of the second cup, draws it on the *drawer*,”—the tapster, “when indeed there *is* no need!”

“Am I like such a fellow?” asks his young companion, looking around warily.

“Come, come!—thou art as hot a Jack, in thy mood, as any in *Italy*!—and as soon moved to be moody, and as soon moody to be moved!”

“And what *to*?”

“Nay, an there were *two* such, we should have *none* shortly—for one would kill the other!

“*Thou?*—why, thou wilt quarrel with a man that hath a *hair* more or a hair less in his beard than *thou* hast! Thou wilt quarrel with a man for *cracking nuts*, having no other reason but because thou hast *hazel* eyes! What eye but *such* an *I* would spy out such a quarrel?”

“Thy head is as full of quarrels as an *egg* is full!—and yet thy head hath been *beaten* as addled as an egg in *quarrelling*!”

“Thou hast quarreled with a man for *coughing* in the street because he hath wakened thy *dog*, that had lain asleep in the sun! Didst thou not fall out with a *tailor* for wearing his new doublet *before Easter*?—with another, for tying his *new* shoes with *old riband*?”

“And yet thou wilt tutor *me* from quarreling!”

Benvolio laughs, rejecting the inventive arguments. “An I were so apt to quarrel as *thou* art, any man should buy the fee-simple of my *life* for a quarter of an hour!”

“The ‘fee-simple!’” laughs Mercutio, at the legal term for complete ownership. “Oh, *simple*!”

But now Benvolio’s face clouds. “By my head, here come the Capulets!”

“By my *heel*, I care *not*,” says Mercutio.

Tybalt and several men of his family’s household enter the market space. “Follow me close,” he tells the others, “for I will speak to them.”

He approaches Benvolio. “Gentlemen, good e’en. A word with one of you,” he demands.

“And but *one* word, with *one* of us?” says Mercutio contemptuously: “*Couple* it with something!—make it a word and a *blow*!”

“You shall find me apt enough to that, sir, an you will give me occasion, Mercutio.”

“Could you not *take* some occasion without my giving?”

“Mercutio, thou consort’st with Romeo—”

“*Consort! What*—dost thou make us *minstrels*?”—as in consort singers. “An thou make minstrels of us, look to hear nothing but *discords*! Here’s *my* fiddlestick!” he says, slapping the handle of his sword. “Here’s what shall make *you* dance!” He growls, “*Zounds!*—*consort!*”

Benvolio appeals for calm. “We talk here in the public haunt of men. Either withdraw unto some private place and reason coldly of your grievances, or else depart!—here all eyes gaze on us!”

“Men’s eyes were *made* to look; then let them gaze,” says Mercutio. “I will not budge for any man’s pleasure!”

“Well, peace be with *you*, sir,” Tybalt tells him, as Romeo approaches. “Here comes *my* man....”

Mercutio objects vigorously: “I’ll be hanged, sir, if he *wear your livery*! Marry, go before to *duel* and he’ll be your follower!—*Your Worship* in *that* sense may call him ‘man!’”

But Tybalt sees only his target. “Romeo, the hate I bear thee can afford no better term than this: thou art a *villain*!”

“Tybalt,” says Romeo gently, “the *reason* that I have to love thee doth much excuse the appertaining rage to such a greeting! Villain am I none; therefore *farewell*—I see thou know’st me not.” The young man, just now married, starts to go.

“*Boy*, this shall not excuse the injuries that thou hast done me!—therefore turn and *draw*!”

Romeo is eager to be away. “I do protest I never injured thee, but love thee better than thou canst devise, till thou shalt know the reason of my love! And so, good Capulet—which name I tender as dearly as my own—be satisfied.”

Mercutio, annoyed, then ignored, is disgusted by that. “Oh, calm, dishonourable, vile *submission!* *Alla stoccata* carries it!” On the Italian term for *thrust*, he draws his rapier. “Tybalt, you *rat-catcher*, will you *walk away?*”

Tybalt recognizes his peril. “What wouldst *thou* have with me?”

“Good king of *cats*, nothing but one of your nine *lives!* That I mean to make bold withal; and so that you shall use me well hereafter, *drybeat* the rest of the eight!” He sees that Tybalt pauses. “Will you pluck your sword out of its pilcher by the ears? Make *haste*, lest *mine* be about your ears ere it be out!”

“I am for you,” says Tybalt coldly, drawing his blade.

As the leveled swords approach each other, Romeo pleads for peace: “Gentle Mercutio, put thy rapier up!”

Mercutio sneers at Tybalt. “Come, sir, your *passado!*”

The two fight—expertly, and with furious energy.

“Draw, Benvolio!—beat down their weapons!” cries Romeo. “Gentlemen, for *shame*, forbear this outrage! *Tybalt, Mercutio*, the prince expressly hath forbidden bandying in Verona streets!”

Romeo steps bravely between the combatants, right palm raised. “*Hold*, Tybalt!” He turns to his friend. “Good Mercutio—”

With startling speed, Tybalt plunges his blade past Romeo’s upheld arm, stabbing Mercutio. He pulls the sword free—and immediately flees, clutching the weapon, among his followers.

Mercutio staggers. “I am hurt,” he utters, astonished. He stares down at the spreading stain, then looks up, blinking. “A *plague* o’ *both* your houses! I am *sped!*” He watches Tybalt’s men as they run. “Is he gone, and hath nothing?”

“What, art thou *hurt?*” From the side, Benvolio saw the thrust but not the hit.

“Aye. Aye, a scratch, a scratch.” Mercutio sees that blood streams over his hand, which covers the wound. “Marry—’tis enough.” he says. “Where is my page? Go, villain, fetch a surgeon.” The boy runs for help from the palace.

“*Courage*, man,” says Romeo. “The hurt cannot be much....”

Mercutio grins despite his injury. “No, ’tis not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church-door, but ’tis *enough*; ’twill *serve!* Ask for me tomorrow, and you shall find me a *grave* man!”

He coughs up blood and spits it out. “I am peppered, I warrant, for this world.” His jaws tighten as the pain grows. “A plague on *both* your houses,” he mutters, exasperated. “’*Zounds!*—a dog, a rat, a mouse—a *cat*, to scratch a *man* to death! A braggart, a rogue, a *villain* that fights by the book of *arithmetic!*”

“Why the devil came you between us? I was hurt under your arm!”

Romeo is still stunned. “I thought all for the best....”

Mercutio sags. “Help me into some house, Benvolio, or I shall faint. *A plague* o’ *both* your houses! They have made worms’ meat of me! I have it, and soundly, too!”

Benvolio is carrying Mercutio, whose feet drag along the pavement as he weakens. “...your *houses*,” he rasps.

Romeo stares down, trying to comprehend, and sees the spilled blood. *This gentleman—the prince’s near ally—my very friend!—hath got his mortal hurt in my behalf!*

My reputation is stained with Tybalt’s slander!—Tybalt, that an hour hath been my kinsman! O sweet Juliet, thy beauty hath made me effeminate, and in my tempering, softened valour’s steel!

Benvolio returns, his face ashen. “Oh, Romeo, Romeo!—*brave Mercutio’s dead!* That gallant spirit which too untimely here did scorn the earth hath aspirèd to the clouds!”

Tears trace their way down Romeo’s face; but his expression is grim. “This day’s black fate on more days doth depend; this but *begins* a woe that others must end!”

Benvolio grasps his shoulder and points. "Here comes the furious *Tybalt* back again!"
"Alive, in *triumph*—and *Mercutio slain!*" cries Romeo, livid with anger. "*Away to heaven, respectful lenity!*—and fire-eyed *fury* be my conduct now!"

He stares with steely menace as *Tybalt*, the fatal sword still in hand, comes toward him.

"Now, *Tybalt*, take the 'villain' *back* again that late thou gavest me!" says Romeo, drawing his rapier, his voice raw, "for *Mercutio's* soul is but a little way above our heads, staying for thine to keep him company! Either thou, or I, or *both*, must go *with* him!"

"*Thou*, wretched boy, that didst consort him here, shalt with him hence!"

Romeo raises his blade. "*This* shall determine that!"

They fight—and the bully is startled: under the relentless onslaught of Romeo's blazing wrath, *Tybalt* finds that his skill, experience and wiliness are little help. Romeo, enraged, drives forward violently. Dashing his foe's weapon aside, he stabs deep—and, glaring, holds the sword steady where it struck.

Tybalt gapes for a moment, aghast. And now—his defining hatred finally spent—he falls, sliding down from the blade in his chest. He lies dead in the street.

The voice seems to be calling again from a distance.

"... Romeo, *away!* Be *gone!*" pleads Benvolio. "The *citizens* are up, and *Tybalt slain!*"

"Stand not *amazed!* The prince will doom thee *death* if thou art taken! *Hence*, be gone!—*away!*"

Despite having just won, Romeo can feel only what he has lost.

He sobs, devastated, crying out to the skies: "Oh, I am *fortune's fool!*"

Benvolio tugs at his arm. "Why dost thou *stay?*" He manages to propel Romeo, benumbed, away from the sprawled corpse of his wife's cousin.

Residents and merchants have ventured forth to see the extent of this latest violence. And the prince has learned of his kinsman's death; he is on his way here.

"Which way ran he that killed *Mercutio?*" calls one of *Escalus's* men, just now rounding the corner. "*Tybalt*, that *murderer!*—which way ran he?"

Benvolio is crouched beside the dead man. "Here lies *Tybalt.*"

"Up, sir! Go with me, I charge thee; in the prince's name, obey!"

As *Escalus* arrives on horseback with his retinue, armed attendants take control of the square. *Montague* and *Capulet* emerge from their homes with their wives, and they approach the lord of *Verona*.

"Where are the vile beginners of this fray?" demands the ruler.

"O noble prince," says Benvolio, "I can reveal all the unfortunate manage of this fatal brawl. There lies the man, slain by young Romeo, that slew thy kinsman, brave *Mercutio.*"

Lady *Capulet* looks—and cries out: "*Tybalt*, my cousin! Oh, *my brother's child!* O prince! O *cousin!* Husband! Oh, the blood is spilt of *my dear kinsman!*"

"Prince, as thou art true, for blood of *ours*, *shed blood of Montague!*"

"O cousin, *cousin!*" she sobs.

"Benvolio, who *began* this bloody fray?" asks *Escalus*.

"*Tybalt*, here slain, whom Romeo's hand did slay! Romeo, who spoke him fair, bade him bethink how narrow the quarrel was, and stressed withal *your* high displeasure!"

"All this, utterèd with gentle breath, calm look, knees humbly bowed, could not make truce with the unruly spleen of *Tybalt*, *deaf to peace!* And then he tilts with piercing steel at bold *Mercutio's* breast!—who, all as hot, turns deadly point to point, and with a martial scorn, with one hand beats cold death *aside* and with the other sends it *back* to *Tybalt!*—whose dexterity retorts it!"

“Romeo, *he* cries aloud, ‘*Hold*, friends! Friends, *part!*’ And, swifter than his tongue, his agile arm beats *down* their fatal points, and ’twixt them he rushes!—underneath whose arm an envious thrust from Tybalt hit the life of stout Mercutio!

“And then Tybalt *fled!*—but by and by comes *back!*—to Romeo, who had but newly considered *revenge!*—and to ’t they go like *lightning!*—for ere I could draw to part them was stout Tybalt *slain!*”

“And, as he *fell* did Romeo turn and fly.” He looks up the prince. “This is the truth, or let Benvolio die.”

“*He* is a kinsman to the *Montagues!*” protests Lady Capulet. “Affection makes him *false!* He speaks not true!—some *twenty* of *them* fought in this black strife, and all those twenty could kill but one life!

“I beg for *justice*, which thou, prince, must give! Romeo slew *Tybalt!* Romeo *must not live!*”

The prince glares. “Romeo slew *him!* he slew *Mercutio!* Who now the price for *his* dear blood doth owe?”

“Not *Romeo*, prince!” insists Lord Montague. “He was Mercutio’s *friend!* His fault but concluded what the *law* should end: the life of *Tybalt!*”

“And for that offence immediately we do *exile* him hence,” says the prince.

“I have an interest in your hate’s proceeding,” he tells the nobles angrily. “*My* blood for *your rude brawls* doth lie a-bleeding!

“But I’ll amerce you with so *strong* a fine that you *shall* all repent this loss of mine! I will be *deaf* to pleading and excuses—not tears nor prayers shall purchase-out abuses; therefore *use* none!

“Let Romeo hence in haste!—else, when he’s found, that hour is his last!

“Bear hence this body, and attend our will.

“Mercy but *murders*, pardoning those that kill!”

Chapter Seven Lovers’ Torment

At the back of the Capulet mansion, a joyous new bride steps lightly into the garden of her lifelong home to savor the sun’s warmth—despite wishing the daylight done.

Juliet looks up, smiling. *Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds, toward Phoebus’ lodging! Such a wagoner as Phaethon would whip you to the west, and bring in cloudy night immediately!*

She hugs herself, watching the sky. *Spread thy close curtain, love-protecting night, so runaways’ eyes may close, and Romeo leap to these arms, untalked of and unseen! Lovers can see to do their amorous rites by their own beauties! Or, if love be blind, it best agrees with night!*

Come, civil Night, thou sober-suited matron, all in black, and teach me how to lose a winning match, played by two for a stainless maidenhood! Hood with thy dark mantle unmannèd blood abating from my cheeks, till unfamiliar love, grown bold, finds true love acted simple modesty!

Come, night! Come, Romeo!—come, thou day in night, for thou wilt lie upon the wings of night whiter than new snow on a raven’s back!

Come, gentle night!—come, loving, black-browed night!—give me my Romeo! And when he shall die, take him and cut him out in little stars, and he will make the face of heaven so fine that all the world will be in love with night, and pay no worship to the garish sun!

She paces. *Oh, I have bought the mansion of a love, but not possessed it!—and though I am sold, not yet enjoyed! So tedious is this day as is the night before some festival to an impatient child that hath new robes but may not wear them!*

She sees movement at the gate. *Oh, here comes my nurse, and she brings news!—and every tongue that speaks but Romeo’s name speaks heavenly eloquence!* “Now, Nurse, what news? What hast thou there—the cords that Romeo bid thee fetch?”

The woman is clearly in dismay. “Aye, aye, the cords.” She drops the coil of rope ladder.

“Ay, me! What news? Why dost thou wring thy hands?”

“Ah, well-a-day! He’s dead, he’s dead, he’s dead!” cries the nurse. “We are *undone*, lady, we are *undone*! Alack the day!—he’s gone, he’s killed, he’s dead!”

Juliet pales, stricken. “Can heaven be so callous?”

“Romeo can, though heaven cannot!” says the nurse bitterly. “Oh, Romeo, *Romeo!*—who ever would have *thought* it? *Romeo!*”

“What *devil* art thou, that dost *torment* me thus?” demands frantic Juliet. “*This* torture should be roared in dismal *Hell*! Hath Romeo *slain himself*? If he be slain, say ‘aye,’ or if not ‘no’—*brief* sounds determine of my weal or woe!”

“I saw the *wound!*” wails the nurse. “*I saw it with mine eyes*, God save the mark, here on his manly breast! A piteous *corpse*, a *bloody*, piteous *corpse!*—pale, pale as *ashes*, all bedaubed in blood, all in *gory blood!* I swooned at the sight!”

“Oh, *break*, my heart, poor bankrupt, *break at once!*” sobs Juliet. “To *prison*, eyes; ne’er look on liberty!” She strikes at her heart. “Vile *earth*, to earth *resign!*—end *motion* here, and thou and Romeo press one heavy bier!”

“O *Tybalt*, *Tybalt*, the best friend I had!” cries the nurse. “O courteous *Tybalt*! Honest gentleman! That ever I should live to see thee dead!”

Juliet is appalled: “What storm is *this* that blows so *contrary*?—is Romeo slaughtered, and is *Tybalt* dead?—my dear-loved cousin *and* my dearer *lord*? Then, dreadful trumpet, sound the general doom!—for who is *living*, if those two are gone?”

The nurse wags her head tearfully. “*Tybalt* is gone, and Romeo banished—Romeo that killed him, he is *banished!*”

“Oh, *God!* Did *Romeo*’s hand shed *Tybalt*’s blood?”

“It did, it *did*; alas the day, it *did!*”

Juliet pictures her husband—a Montague. “O *serpent* heart, hid with a flowering face! Did ever *dragon* keep so fair a cave? Beautiful *tyrant!* Fiend *angelical!* Dove-feathered *raven!*—*wolfish*, ravening *lamb!* *Despisèd* substance of divinest *show!* Just *opposite* to what thou justly *seem*’st, a damnèd saint, an honourable *villain!*”

“O *Nature*, what hadst thou to do in *Hell* when thou didst bower the spirit of a *fiend* in the mortal paradise of such sweet flesh? Was ever book containing such vile matter so *fairly* bound? Oh, that deceit should dwell in such a gorgeous palace!”

“There’s no trust, no faith, no honesty in *men!*” groans the nurse. “All perjured, all forsworn—all *naught*, all *dissemblers!*” She looks around for Peter. “Ay, where’s my man? Give me some aqua vitae!”—spirituous liquor. “These griefs, these *woes*, these sorrows make me *old*,” she complains. “*Shame* come to Romeo!”

“*Blistered* be thy tongue for such a wish!” cries Juliet angrily. “*He* was not born to *shame!*—upon *his* brow, *Shame* is *ashamed* to sit; for ’tis a throne where *Honour* may be crownèd sole monarch of the universal earth! Oh, what a *beast* was I to chide at him!”

The nurse stares. “Will you speak *well* of him that killed your cousin?”

“Shall I speak *ill* of him that is my *husband*? *Ah*, poor my lord, what tongue shall *smooth* thy name, when *I*, thy three-hours wife, have mangled it?”

“But, wherefore, *villain*, didst thou *kill my cousin*?” She pictures *Tybalt*—and suddenly she realizes: “That villain cousin would have killed my *husband!*”

“*Back*, foolish tears, back to your native spring!—you tributary drops belong to *joy* which you, mistaking, offer up to woe!”

“My husband *lives*, whom *Tybalt* would have slain; and *Tybalt*’s dead, that would have slain my husband—all this is *comfort!* Wherefore *weep* I then?”

Frowning and thinking, she bites her lip. “Some *word* there was, that worsè than *Tybalt*’s death murdered *me!* I would fain forget it, but, *oh*, it presses to my memory like damnèd guilty

deeds to sinners' minds: 'Tybalt is dead, and Romeo banished'—that *banishèd*, that one word *banishèd*, had slain ten *thousand!*'

Tybalt's death was woe enough, if it had ended there! she thinks. *Or if sour Woe delights in fellowship, and needly will be ranked with other griefs, when she said 'Tybalt's dead,' why followed not 'thy father,' or 'thy mother'—nay, or both!—which to ordinary lamentations might have moved me?*

But with the rear word following Tybalt's death—Romeo is 'banishèd'—to speak that word is father, mother, Tybalt, Romeo—Juliet!—all slain, all dead!

She looks at the sorrowful nurse. "Romeo is *banishèd!*—there is no end, no limit, measure, bound, in that word's death!—no word can that woe sound!"—none can plumb so deep.

Then Juliet pauses, thinking. "Where are my father and my mother, Nurse?"

"Weeping and wailing over Tybalt's corpse. Will you go to them? I will bring you thither."

Juliet shakes her head. "Wash *they* his wounds with tears!—*mine* shall be spent, when theirs are dry, for Romeo's banishment!

"Take up those cords. Poor ropes, you are beguiled—*both* you and I—for Romeo is exiled. He made you for a highway to my bed—but I, a maid, die maiden *widowèd!*

"Come, cords; come, Nurse. I'll to my wedding-bed. But Death, not Romeo, will take my maidenhead."

The nurse rouses herself at last. "Hie to your chamber. I'll find Romeo to comfort you," she offers. "I wot well where he is.

"Hark ye, your Romeo will be here at night. I'll to him; he is hid at Laurence's cell."

"Oh, find him!" pleads poor Juliet. "Give this ring to my true knight, and bid him come to take his last farewell!"

Friar Laurence has been walking about the city at dusk, listening; he returns to the monastery, and in his own dim chambers pulls back the closet curtain.

"Romeo, come forth! Come forth, thou fearful man! Affliction is enamoured of thy parts, and thou art wedded to calamity!"

"Father, what news?—what sorrow craves acquaintance with my heart that I yet know not?"

"Too familiar is my dear son with such sour company," says the monk. "I bring thee tidings of the prince's doom"—ruling.

"What less than *doomsday*"—Judgment Day, the last—"is the prince's doom?"

"A *gentler* judgment from *his* lips: not body's *death*, but body's banishment."

"Banishment! Be *merciful*—say '*death!*' For exile hath *more* terror in its look!—*much* more than death! Do not say 'banishment!'"

Laurence, relieved by the prince's sentence, is calm. "Hence from *Verona* art thou banished; be patient, for the world is broad and wide."

"There is *no* world without Verona walls but purgatory, torture, Hell itself! Hence banished is banished from the *world!*—and world's exile is *death!* Then 'banished' is death *mis-termèd*; calling death banishment, thou cutt'st my head off with a *golden* axe, and *smilest* upon the stroke that *murders* me!"

"*Oh, deadly sin!*" chides the priest. "*Oh, rude unthankfulness!* For thy crime our *law* calls for *death!*—but the kind prince, taking thy part, hath *brushed aside* the law, and turned that black word *death* to *banishment*. This is dear *mercy!*—and thou seest it not!"

Romeo is hardly comforted. "'Tis *torture*, and not *mercy!*—heaven is *here*, where *Juliet* lives!—and every cat and dog and little mouse, every unworthy thing, lives here in *heaven* and may look on her—but *Romeo* may *not!*

"More validity, a more honourable state—more *courtship!*—lives in *carrion-flies* than in *Romeo!* *They* may seize on the white wonder of dear Juliet's hand, and steal immortal blessing from her lips, which even in pure and vestal modesty still blush, thinking their *own* kisses"—

touching each other—"a sin! But *Romeo* may not—he is *banished!* Flies may *do* this, but *I* from this must *fly*; they are as *free men*, but *I* am *banishèd!*

"And say'st thou yet that exile is not *death*? Hadst thou no *poison* mixed, no sharp-ground *knife*, no sudden means of death though ne'er so lowly, but 'banishèd' to kill me?"

"Banished! Oh, Friar, the *damnèd* use that word in *Hell*; *howling* attends it! How hast thou the *heart*—being a divine, a ghostly confessor, a sin-absolver, and my *friend* professèd—to mangle me with that word *banished*?"

"Thou *foolish, mad man*, hear me but speak a *word!*" Friar Laurence has seen many sorrows, listened to many laments.

But *Romeo*, weeping and petulant, turns away. "Oh, thou wilt speak *again* of banishment!"

"I'll give thee *armour* to *keep off* that word: adversity's sweet milk, *philosophy*, to comfort thee, though thou art banished."

"*Yet 'banished!*' Hang philosophy!—unless philosophy can make a *Juliet*, displant a *town*, reverse a *prince's* doom, it *helps not*, it *prevails not!* Talk no more!"

"Ah, then I see that *madmen* have no *ears*...."

"Why *should* they, when *wise* men have no *eyes*?" sobs *Romeo*, dropping to his knees on the stone floor, overwhelmed by grief.

"Let me *dispute* with thee on thy estate," pleads the priest.

Romeo shakes his head. "Thou canst not speak of that thou dost not *feel!* Wert thou as young as I—*Juliet thy* love, *married* but an *hour*, *doting* like me—like me *banished* as *Tybalt's murderer*—then mightst thou speak! Then mightst thou tear thy hair, and fall upon the ground, as I do now, taking the measure of an unmade grave!"

Someone is at the door. "Arise!" whispers Laurence. "One knocks! Good *Romeo*, *hide* thyself!"

"Not *I!*—unless the breath of heartsick *groans* infold me, mist-like, from the search of eyes!"

"Hark, how they knock!"

"*Who's there?*" calls the priest. Again whispering, he urges the boy to collect himself:

"*Romeo*, arise; thou wilt be *taken!*"

"*Stay awhile,*" calls Laurence toward the door. "Stand up!" he tells *Romeo*.

There is further rapping—and louder.

"Run to my study!" But *Romeo* continues weeping. "*By and by!*" calls the monk to the door, annoyed as the pounding continues. "God's will, what simpleness is this? *I come, I come!*" The insistent pounding starts again as he reaches the closed door. "Who knocks so hard? Whence come you? What's your will?"

"Let me come *in,*" calls the nurse, her voice muffled by the thick wood, "and you shall *know* my errand! I come from *Lady Juliet!*"

Friar Laurence unbars the door and pulls it open. "Welcome, then!"

"O holy friar, *oh, tell* me, holy friar, where is my lady's lord!" she says, coming into the room. "Where's *Romeo?*"

Laurence moves aside. "There on the ground, with his own tears made *drunk.*"

"Oh, he is even in *my mistress's* case, just in *her* case! Oh *woeful* sympathy!—piteous predicament! Even so lies *she*, blubbering and weeping, weeping and blubbering!"

"Stand up, *stand up!*" she cries. "Stand, an you be a *man!* For *Juliet's* sake—for *her* sake—rise and *stand!*—why should *you* fall into so deep a woe?"

Romeo sobs, "*Nurse!*"

"*Oh, sir, oh, sir!*" she moans. "Well, death's the end of all."

Slowly he gets to his feet. "Spakest thou of *Juliet*? How is it with her? Doth she not think me a cold *murderer*, now that I have stained the childhood of our joy with blood removèd but little from her own?"

"Where is she? And how doth she? And what says my concernèd lady to our canceled love?"

“Oh, she says *nothing*, sir,” the nurse reports, “but *weeps* and *weeps!*—and now falls on her bed; and then starts up, and Tybalt calls! And then on *Romeo!* cries!—and then down *falls* again!”

“As if shot from the deadly level of a gun; that *name* did *murder* her,” he says, in utter despair, “as that name’s cursèd *hand* murdered her kinsman!”

Romeo pulls out his dagger. “Oh, tell me, Friar, tell me in what vile part of this anatomy doth my *name* lodge? *Tell me*—so that I may *sack* the hateful mansion!”

“*Hold* thy desperate hand!” cries Friar Laurence, seizing his wrist. “Art thou a *man*? Thy *form* cries out what thou art, but thy *tears* are *womanish!* Thy wild acts denote the unreasoning fury of a *beast!* *Unseemly* woman in a seeming man, or *ill-beseeming* beast, in seeming *both!*

“Thou hast *amazèd* me! By my holy order, I thought thy disposition better tempered!

“Hast thou slain Tybalt? Wilt thou slay *thyself?*—and slay *thy lady*, too, who lives in thee, by doing *damnèd hate* upon thyself?

“Why *rail’st* thou on thy birth, the heavens and earth, since birth, heaven and earth do *meet* in thee at once!—and which *thou* at once wouldst *lose!*

“*Fie, fie!* Thou *shamest* thy shape, thy love, thy *wit!*—which thou abound’st in, *all*, yet like a usurer, usest *none* in that *true* use which should indeed bedeck thy shape, thy love, thy wit! *Thy* noble shape is but a form of *wax*, digressing from the valour of a *man!*—*thy* dear love sworn but hollow *perjury*, killing that love which thou hast vowed to cherish! *Thy* wit—that ornament to shape and love—*misshapen* in the conduct of them *both!*

“Like gunpowder in a careless soldier’s flask; *set afire* by thine own ignorance art thou *dismembered* by thine own *defence!*”

Romeo has listened to the severe judgment unmoving—but moved.

“What?—*rouse* thee, man! Thy Juliet is *alive*, for whose dear sake thou wast but lately dead; there art thou *fortunate!* Tybalt would kill thee, but thou slew’st Tybalt; *there* are thou fortunate too! The law that threatened *death* becomes thy friend, and turns it to exile; *there* art thou fortunate!

“A *pack* of blessings lights up upon thy back! Fortune courts thee in her best array!

“But, like a misbehavèd and sullen *wench*, thou *pout’st* upon thy fortune and thy love! Take heed, take *heed*—for such die *pathetically!*” He releases the boy’s arm.

Romeo, still sullen, sheathes the knife.

“Go, get thee to thy love, as was decided! Ascend her chamber, hence, and *comfort* her!

“But look thou stay not till the watch be set!”—until city-gate guards man their posts for the night. “For then thou canst not pass to *Mantua*—where thou shalt live till we can find a time to emblazon your *marriage*, reconcile your *friends*, beg pardon of the *prince*—and call thee back with twenty, a hundred, a *thousand* times more *joy* than thou went’st forth in lamentation!

“Go before, Nurse,” urges the monk. “Commend me to thy lady, and bid her hasten all the house to bed—which heavy sorrow makes them apt to do. Romeo is coming!”

The nurse’s visit was intended to achieve, quickly, precisely that. “Oh, Lord, I could have stayed here all the *night* to hear good *counsel*,” she says. “Oh, what *learning* is!”

She regards disheveled Romeo. “My lord, I’ll tell my lady you will come.”

He touches her sleeve. “Do so, and bid my sweet to demur chiding....”

“Here, sir,” says the nurse, holding out a hand. “A ring she bid me give you. *Hie* you, sir!—make haste, for it grows very late!”

She heads for home to tell Juliet, who once again is waiting in anguish.

Romeo wipes away tears. “How well my comfort is revived by this!” He slips his wife’s ring onto a finger.

“Go hence; good *night!*” says Friar Laurence. “*Here* stands your state but ill; either be gone before the watch is set, or by the break of day go *disguisèd* from hence!

“Sojourn in Mantua; I’ll seek out your man, and he shall signify to you from time to time every good hap that chances here.

“Give me thy hand. ’Tis late—*good night! Farewell!*”

“But that a *joy past joy* calls out to me,” says Romeo, chastised but grateful, “it were a grief so briefly to part with *thee!*”

“*Farewell!*”

Chapter Eight Cast Away

In a candle-lit room at Lord and Lady Capulet’s house they have been reassuring a late but welcome visitor, Count Paris.

“Things have fall’n out, sir, so unluckily that we have had no time to speak with our daughter,” says the graybeard. “Look you, she loved her kinsman Tybalt dearly!

“And so did I,” he mumbles; all too often had his firebrand nephew roiled youthful hotheads among their household staff. “Well,” he sighs, “we were born to die.

“’Tis very late; she’ll not come down tonight. But for your company, I can tell you, *I* would have been abed an hour ago.”

The count has been impatient, but polite. He rises from his seat. “These times of woe afford no time to woo. Madam, good night. Commend me to your daughter.”

“I will know her mind *early*,” she tells him, rising. “Tonight she is mewed up in the heaviness of her grief.”

Lord Capulet has encouraged this match—and he wants to incur no further displeasure from Prince Escalus. “Sir Paris, I will make a determinate tender of my child’s love,” he says. “I think she will be ruled in all respects by me—nay, more, I doubt it not!

“Wife, go you to her ere you go to bed. Acquaint her with my son-in-law Paris’s love, and bid her, mark you me, on Wednesday—” He pauses. “But, soft... what day is this?”

“Monday, my lord,” says Paris.

“Monday.” He thinks. “*Hmm...hmm...* Well, Wednesday is too soon—o’ Thursday let it be; o’ *Thursday*, tell her, she shall be *married* to this noble earl!

“Will you be ready?” he asks the smiling suitor. “Do you like this haste? We’ll keep no great ado—a friend or two—for, hark you, Tybalt being so lately slain, it may be thought we held him carelessly, being our kinsman, if we revel much. Therefore we’ll have some half a dozen friends, and there an end.

“But what say you to Thursday?”

“My lord, I would that Thursday were *tomorrow!*” says Paris warmly.

“Well, get you gone; o’ Thursday be it, then,” Capulet rules. “Go you, wife, to Juliet ere you go to bed; prepare her regarding this wedding-day.

“Farewell, my lord!”

Capulet calls to his serving-man. “*Light* to my chamber; go, afore me! He yawns. “It is so very, *very* late that we may call it *early* by and by!

“Good night!” he bids the others comfortably, his task accomplished.

Upstairs in her bedroom, Juliet gazes lovingly at her tired new husband, who is making ready to leave. “Wilt thou be gone? It is not yet *near* day!—it was the *nightingale*, and not the lark, that pierced the fearful hollow of thine ear! Nightly she sings on yon pomegranate tree. Believe me, love, it was the nightingale!”

Romeo smiles at her fib. “It was the lark, the herald of the morn, no nightingale.”

He moves to the open window, aware of the dark orchard below and beyond, and of the starry black sky. “Look, love, what envious streaks do lace the severing clouds in yonder east! Night’s candles are burnt out, and jocund day stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops.”

He turns to her. “I must be gone, and *live*, or stay and die.”

Juliet pleads for more time. “Yon light is not *daylight*, I *know* it!—it is some meteor that the sun exhales, to be for thee this night a torch-bearer, and light thee on thy way to Mantua! Therefore stay yet! Thou need’st not to be gone....”

Romeo is happy and satisfied. “Let me be ta’en, let me be put to death; I am content. If *thou* wilt have it so, I’ll say yon grey is *not* the morning’s eye—’tis but the pale reflex of Cynthia’s brow”—moonlight. “Nor is that the lark whose notes do beat the vaulty heaven so high above our heads. I have more *desire* to stay than will to *go*! Come, death, and welcome! *Juliet* wills it so!”

He sighs, taking her hand. “How is’t, my soul? Let’s talk; it is *not* day.”

Her glistening eyes study his face intently. “It *is*,” Juliet admits sorrowfully, “it is! Hie hence, be gone, *away*! It *is* the lark that sings—so *out of tune*, in straining, harsh *discords* and unpleasing *sharps*! Some say the lark makes *sweet* division; *this* doth not so, for she divideth *us*! Some say the lark and loathsome toad exchanged eyes; oh, how I would they had ’changed *voices* too, since arm-from-arm that voice doth us affray, hunting thee hence—with ‘*Hunt’s-up!*’ and ‘*To the day!*’ Oh, now be *gone!*—more light and light it grows!”

“The more light at light; the *darker* our dark *woes*.”

The door opens just a crack. “Madam—”

“Nurse?”

“—the lady *your mother* is coming to your chamber! The day is broke—be *wary*, look about!” she warns. Closing the door, she returns to her domestic duties.

Juliet comes to the rail. “Then, window, let day in, and let *life* out!”

“Farewell, farewell!” says Rome. “One kiss, and I’ll descend.”

After several, he kneels on the window ledge, his feet find the rope ladder, and he moves down out of sight into the shadows.

“Art thou gone so?” she whispers. “Love, *lord—aye*, husband, *friend*! I must hear from thee every day by the *hour*, for in a minute there are many *days*! *Oh*, by that count I shall be much in *years* ere I again behold my Romeo!”

“Farewell!” he says. “I will omit no opportunity that may convey greetings, my love, to thee!”

“Oh, think’st thou we shall ever meet again?” she asks tearfully.

“I doubt it not!” he tells her bravely. “And all these woes shall serve for sweet discourses in our time to come!”

Peering down into the darkness, Juliet is fearful. “Oh, God, I have an *ill*-divining soul: methinks I see thee, now thou art below, as one dead in the bottom of a tomb! Either my eyesight fails, or thou look’st *pale*.”

“And, trust me, love, in my eye so do you: *dry sorrow* stints our blood! Adieu, *adieu!*”

He is gone.

Juliet steps back, chilled and alone, clutching her arms.

O Fortune, Fortune! All men call thee fickle; if thou art fickle, what dost thou with him that is renownèd as faithful? Be fickle, Fortune—for then, I hope, thou wilt not keep him long, but send him back!

Lady Capulet is at the door: “Daughter! Are you up?”

“Who is’t that calls?” asks Juliet, coming from the window. *My lady Mother—is she not down so late? Or, up so early, what unaccustomed cause procures her hither?*

“Why, how now, Juliet?” asks the matron, coming into the bedroom.

“Madam, I am not well.” says the forlorn young wife truthfully.

“*Tsk!* Evermore *weeping* for your cousin’s death.” The lady has little patience for suffering. “What?—wilt thou wash him from his grave with *tears*? Even if thou couldst, thou couldst not make him live; therefore, have *done*. Some grief shows much of love, but *much* grief *still* shows some want of *wit*.”

A breeze from the window touches Juliet’s skin. “Yet let me weep for such a *feeling* loss.”

“So shall you feel the *loss*, but not the friend which you weep for.”

“Feeling *so* the loss,” says Juliet—already missing her lover—“I cannot choose but ever weep the *friend!*”

“Well, girl, weep thou not so much for his death as that the villain *lives* who slaughtered him!”

“‘Villain’ and he be many miles *asunder!* God *pardon* him; I do, with all my heart. And yet no man like he doth *grieve* my heart.”

Fierce Lady Capulet thinks she is speaking of Tybalt. “We *will* have *vengeance* for it,” she vows, “fear thou not! Weep no more! I’ll send one to where that same banished runagate doth live who shall give him such an unaccustomed *dram* that he shall soon keep Tybalt company! And then, I hope, thou wilt be satisfied.”

“Madam, if you could but find out a man to bear a poison, *I* would tamper it so that Romeo should, upon receipt thereof, soon *sleep in quiet!*” Her mother takes that to mean *die*. “Oh, how my heart abhors to hear him named, when I cannot come to him!” moans Juliet—adding, quickly, “to wreak the love I bore my cousin upon his body that slaughtered him.”

“Find thou the *means*, and I’ll find such a man,” says the lady. “But now I’ll tell thee *joyful* tidings, girl.”

“Any joy comes well in such a needy time,” says Juliet. “I beseech Your Ladyship, what are they?”

“Well, well, thou hast a *careful* father, child—one who, to put thee from thy heaviness, hath sorted out a sudden day of joy that thou expect’st not, nor *I* looked not for!”

“Madam, just in time; what day is that?”

“Marry, my child, early on Thursday morn, the gallant, young and noble gentleman, the Count Paris, at Saint Peter’s Church shall happily make thee there a joyful *bride!*”

Thinks Juliet, *Now, by peter’s church—and Saint Peter, too—he shall not make me there a joyful bride!* But she says only, “I wonder at this *haste!*—that I must *wed* ere he who would be husband comes to *woo!*”

“I pray you, tell my lord and father, madam, I will not *marry!*—if I do, I swear it should be *Romeo!*—whom you know I *hate!*—rather than *Paris!*”

“These are news indeed!” she cries in high indignation.

Lady Capulet frowns. “Here comes your *father*; tell him so yourself, and see how *he* will take it at your hands.” They turn toward the door.

As Lord Capulet and the nurse come in he sees Juliet’s tear-stained cheeks. “When the *sun* sets, the air doth drizzle *dew*; but for the sunset of my brother’s son it downright *rains!*” he grumbles. Even in death, Tybalt is troublesome. “How now?—a *conduit*, girl?”

“What, still in *tears?*—evermore in *showers?* In one little body thou counterfeit’st a *boat*, a *sea*, a *wind!* For still thine eyes, which I may call the sea, do *ebb* and *flow* with tears; and the bark thy mind is *sailing* in this salt flood! The winds, thy *sighs!*—which, raging with thy tears, and they with them—from out of a sudden calm beset thy tempest-tossèd being!

“How now, wife? Have you delivered to her our decree?”

“Aye, sir—but *she will none*, she gives you thanks.” The lady scowls. “I would the fool were married to her *grave!*”

Capulet is taken aback. “*Soft!*—take me with you, take me with you, wife.... How? *Wills* she *none?* Doth she not give us *thanks?*—is she not *proud?* Doth she not count her *blest*, unworthy as she is, that we have wrought so *worthy* a gentleman to be her bridegroom?”

“Not *proud* that you have, but *thankful* you have,” says Juliet. “Proud can I never be of what I *hate*; but thankful, despite hate, for what is *meant* as love.”

“*How now*, how now, *chop-logic!*” sputters Capulet. “What is *this?* ‘Proud,’ and ‘I thank you!’—yet ‘I thank you *not*,’ and ‘*not proud?*’”

“*Mistress Minion*, you, thank me no *thankings*, nor proud me no *prouds*, but fetter your fine joints ’gainst Thursday to go with Paris to Saint Peter’s Church, or I will *drag thee thither on a hurdle!*”

“*Out*, you green-sickness *carrion!*” he shouts. “*Out*, you *tallow-face!*”

“*Fie, fie!* What, are you *mad?*” demands Lady Capulet of her child.

“Good Father,” cries Juliet, “I beseech you on my *knees*, with patience *hear* me but speak a word!”

“*Hang* thee, young *baggage!* Disobedient *wretch!*” roars Capulet. “I tell thee *what!*—get thee to *church* o’ Thursday, or never after look me in the face!”

“*Speak* not, *reply* not; do not *answer* me!” he growls, flexing his hands, “my *fingers* itch!”

“Wife, we thought us scarcely blest that God had lent us but this only child—but now I see *this* one is *one too much*, and that we have a *curse* in having her! Out on her, *hilding!*”

“God in heaven, *bless* her!” interjects the nurse. “You are *to blame*, my lord, to berate her so!”

“And *why*, my *Lady Wisdom?* Hold your *tongue*, good *Prudence!*—smatter with your gossips—*go!*”

“I speak no treason!” protests the nurse.

But, agitated even further, he waves her away. “Oh, *God ye good-den!*”

“May not one *speak?*”

“*Peace*, you mumbling *fool!* Utter *your* gravity o’er a *gravy* bowl, for here we need it not!”

Now even Lady Capulet senses danger. “You are too hot....”

But the thwarted lord rages on. “*God’s bread!* It makes me *mad!*—*day, night*—hour of *bed-time, work* or *play*—*alone, in company*, ever my care hath been to have her *matched!*”

“And having now *provided* a gentleman of noble parentage, of fair demesnes, youthful, and nobly trained, *stuffed*, as they say, with honourable parts, proportioned as one’s thought would *wish* a man—

“*Then* to have a wretched, puling *fool*, a whining *mammet*, just as her fortune’s tendered, answer, ‘I’ll not *wed*; I *cannot* love; I am too *young*; I pray you, *pardon* me!’”

He fumes. “As you will not *wed*, I *will* pardon you: graze where you will!—you shall not house with *me!* Look to’t, *think* on’t—I do not use to jest!”

He sees her clasped hands, raised in supplication. “Thursday is *near*; lay hand on *heart, advisèd*: as you be *mine*, I’ll give you to my friend; if you be *not, hang!*—beg, starve, *die in the streets!*—for, by my soul, I’ll ne’er acknowledge thee, nor shall what is mine ever do thee good!”

“*Trust* to’t! *Bethink* you! I’ll not be *forsworn!*” He storms past the nurse and out the door.

Juliet, on her knees, is stunned, her arms limp. *Is there no pity sitting in the clouds, that sees into the bottom of my grief?*

“O sweet my mother, cast me not away!” she pleads. “*Delay* this marriage for a month—a *week!* Or if you do not, make the bridal bed in that dim monument where Tybalt lies!”

Lady Capulet’s face is hard. “Talk not to me, for I’ll not speak a word. Do as thou wilt, for I have *done* with thee!” She turns and leaves the room.

“*Oh, God!*” sobs Juliet. “Oh, Nurse, how shall this be *prevented?* My husband is on earth, my *promise* in heaven! How shall contentment return to earth again unless that husband send it to me from heaven by *leaving* earth? *Comfort* me, *counsel* me!” she begs. “Alack, *alack*, that heaven should practice stratagems upon so soft a subject as myself!”

“What say’st thou? Hast thou not a word of joy? Some *comfort*, Nurse!”

“Faith, here it is,” says the woman. “Romeo is banished in all the world to *nothing*, and he dares ne’er come back to *challenge* you—or, if he do, it needs must be by stealth.”

“Then, since the case so stands as now it doth, I think it best you married with the count.”

“Oh, he’s a *lovely* gentleman! Romeo’s a *dishclout* to him! An eagle, madam, hath not so clean, so quick, so *fair* an eye as *Paris* hath! Beshrew my very heart, I think you are lucky in this

second match, for it excels your first!” She shrugs. “Even if it did not, your first is dead—or ’twere as good he *were*, not living here, and you having no use of him.”

Juliet stares at her. “Speakest thou from thy heart?”

“And from my soul too; or else beshrew them both!”

Juliet closes her tear-stained eyes, her head bowed for a moment in an aching silence.

“*Amen*,” she says quietly.

“What?”

“Well,” says Juliet, slowly rising, “thou hast comforted me marvelous much.

“Go in and tell my lady I am gone, having displeased my father, to Laurence’ cell, to make confession, and to be absolved.”

The nurse is much relieved. “Marry, I will!—and this is wisely done!” She hurries away.

Thinks Juliet, watching her go, *Ancient damnation! Oh, most wicked fiend! Is it more sin to wish me thus forsworn, or to dispraise my lord with that same tongue which hath praised him above compare so many thousand times?*

Go, counselor! Thou and my bosom henceforth shall be twain!

Juliet, bereft, berated and betrayed, finds, in her pain and anger, a cold desperation.

I’ll to the friar, to know his remedy.

If all else fail, my self have power to die.

Chapter Nine A Kind of Hope

Friar Laurence frowns. “On *Thursday*, sir? The time is very short!”

“My father-in-law Capulet will have it so,” says Count Paris, “and I am nothing moved to slacken his haste!”

“You say you do not know the *lady’s* mind,” notes the priest. He shakes his head. “Uneven is the course. I like it not.”

But Paris explains. “Immoderately she weeps for Tybalt’s death, and therefore have I little talked of love; for Venus smiles not in a house of tears. Now, sir, her father accounts it *dangerous* that she doth give her sorrow so much sway, and in his wisdom hastens our marriage to stop the inundation of her tears who, too much minded by herself alone, may be put from them by *companionship*. Now you do know the reason of this haste.”

Thinks the monk, *I would I knew how it should be slowed!* He sees Juliet arriving outside, and wearing the black of mourning. “Look, sir; here comes the lady towards my cell.”

“Happily met, my lady and my wife!” says Paris, beaming.

“That may be, sir, when I may become a wife.”

“That ‘may be’ *must* be, love, on *Thursday*!”

Juliet is composed. “What must be shall be.”

“That’s a certain text,” says the priest.

“Come you to make confession to this father?” asks the count.

“Answering that, I would be confessing to *you*.”

Paris smiles. “Do not deny to him that you love me!”

“I will confess to you that I love *him*.”

“So will ye, I am sure, that you love me!”

“If I do so” says Juliet quietly, “it will be of more price being spoken behind your back than to your face.”

“Poor soul, *thy* face is much abused with tears!” says Paris, attempting a compliment.

“The tears have got small victory by that, for it was bad enough before their spite.”

“Thou wrong’st it more than tears with that report!”

“That is no slander, sir, which is a truth.” Her gaze is direct. “And what *I* spake, I spake it *to my face*,” she says pointedly.

“Thy face is *mine*,” says Paris. “And thou hast *slandered* it!”

“That may be so, as it is not mine own.” She turns away.. “Are you at leisure now, holy father, or shall I come to you at evening Mass?”

“My leisure serves me, pensive daughter, *now*.” Laurence tells Paris, “My lord, we must entreat the time alone.”

“God shield I should disturb devotion!” says Paris. “Juliet, on Thursday early will I rouse ye! Till then, *adieu!*—and keep this holy kiss.” He leans forward to kiss—a turned cheek; ignoring her apparent indifference, he leaves.

After a moment, Juliet gasps, “Oh, *shut the door!*—and when thou hast done so, come *weep* with me!—past *hope*, past *cure*, past *help!*”

“*Ah*, Juliet, I already *know* thy grief!” says the distraught monk. “It strains me past the compass of my *wits!* I hear thou must on Thursday be married to this count, and nothing may postpone it!”

“Tell me not what thou hear’st of that, Friar, unless thou tell me how I may *prevent* it! If in thy wisdom thou canst give no help, do thou but call my *resolution* wise, and with this *knife*”—she draws a dagger from the leather sheath at her waist—“*I’ll* help it immediately!

“God joined my heart and Romeo’s, thou our *hands*. And ere this hand, by thee to Romeo sealed, shall be the liable to *another’s* title, or my true *heart* with treacherous revolt turn to another, this shall slay them both!

“Therefore, out of thy long experience in time, give me some present *counsel!* Or behold: ’twixt my extremes and me this bloody knife shall play the umpire, arbitrating that which the commission of thy years and art could to no issue of true *honour* bring.”

As he thinks, she stares at the thin blade of honed steel. “Be not so long to speak; I long to die, if what thou speak’st speak not of *remedy*.”

Friar Laurence raises both palms in alarm: “*Hold*, daughter!” When she looks up, he wipes his brow and begins pacing—and thinking. “*I do* spy a kind of hope, which craves as *desperate* an execution as that which we would prevent is despicable!

“If rather than to marry Count Paris thou hast the strength of will to slay thyself, then is it likely that, to *drive away* that shame, thou wilt undertake a thing *like* death that copes with death itself to *escape* from it!

“And, if thou *darest*, I’ll give thee remedy!”

Juliet cherishes the hope. “*Oh*, bid me, rather than marry Paris, leap from off the battlements of yonder *tower*, or walk in *thieves’* ways!—or bid me lurk where *serpents* are—chain me with *roaring bears!* Or shut me nightly in a *charnel-house*, o’er-covered quite with dead men’s rattling bones—with reeky shanks and yellow, chapless *skulls!* Or bid me go into a new-made grave and hide me with a *dead man*, in his *shroud!*—things that to *hear them told* have made me tremble!—and I will do it without fear or doubt, to live an unstained wife to my sweet love!”

“Hold, then!” the priest tells her. “Go *home*, be *merry*—give *consent* to marry Paris.” He leans closer. “Tomorrow is Wednesday; tomorrow *night*, look that thou lie *alone*—let not thy nurse lie with thee in thy chamber.”

He goes to a cupboard and removes a small, stoppered bottle. “Take thou this vial, being then in bed, and this distilled liquor drink thou off—and presently through all thy veins shall run a cold and drowsy semblance, for no pulse shall keep its native progress, but *surcease!* No warmth, no breath, shall testify thou livest; the roses in thy lips and cheeks shall fade to pale ashes, thine eyes’ windows fall closed as in death, when it shuts up the day of life! Each part, deprived of supple government, shall, stiff and stark and cold, *appear* like death!

“And in this borrowed, shrunken likeness of death thou shalt continue two and forty hours—and then awake as from a pleasant *sleep!*”

“Now, when the bridegroom in the morning comes to rouse thee from thy bed, there art thou—*dead!*” Friar Laurence shrugs, and spreads his arms, simulating sad acceptance. “Then, as the manner of our country is, in thy best robes, uncovered on the bier thou shalt be borne to that same ancient vault where all the kindred of the Capulets lie.

“In the meantime, before thou shalt awake, *Romeo* shall by my letters know our drift, and hither shall he come—and he and I will watch thy *waking!*”

“Then that very night shall *Romeo* bear thee hence to Mantua!

“And that shall free thee from this presented shame, if no inconstant doubt nor womanish fear abate thy valour in the acting of it.”

“Give it me!” says Juliet, “*give me!*” She holds the vial lovingly. “Oh, tell not me of *fear!*”

Friar Laurence nods. “Get you gone. Hold *strong* in this resolve, and be prosperous! I’ll send a friar with speed to Mantua with my letters to thy lord.”

“*Love* gives me strength,” says Juliet, “and strength shall *help* afford!”

“Farewell, dear father!”

Lord Capulet is busily making many preparations for the hasty wedding he has demanded; the invitation list has grown from two, to half a dozen, to *many*. The nurse, now back in his lordship’s good graces, listens with his wife as he dispatches serving-men on errands.

“So many guests invite as here are writ!” he tells a young pantry helper, handing him several notes. Antony, as it happens, can read, a little; he bows and hurries on his way. “Sirrah,” Capulet tells the butler’s man, Potpan, “go hire me twenty cunning cooks!”

“You shall have none ill, sir—for I’ll learn if they can lick their fingers.”

Capulet frowns. “How canst thou appraise them so?”

“Marry, sir, ‘Tis an ill cook that cannot lick his own finger.’ Therefore he that cannot lick his fingers goes not with *me!*”

Says Capulet wearily, “*Go, be gone!*”

His wife shakes her head. “We shall be much unfurnished in this time!”

The nobleman asks the nurse “What, is my daughter gone to Friar Laurence?”

“*Aye, forsooth!*”

”Well, *he* may chance to do some good on her—a peevish, self-willed harlotry it is!”

The nurse spots Juliet returning. “See where she comes from shrift—with a *merry* look!”

“How now, my headstrong?” asks gruff Lord Capulet. “Where have you been gadding?”

“Where I have taught myself to repent the sin of disobedient opposition to you and your behests,” says Juliet submissively, “and am enjoined by holy Laurence to fall prostrate here, and beg your pardon.” She drops to her knees in supplication. “Pardon, I beseech you. Henceforward I am ever ruled by you.”

Capulet wastes no time: “Send for the count!” he tells a man. “Go tell him of this; I’ll have this knot knit up *tomorrow morning!*”

“I met the youthful lord at Laurence’s cell,” Juliet tells her father, “and gave him what becoming love I might, not stepping o’er the bounds of modesty.”

“Why, I am glad on’t! This is well!” says Capulet. “Stand up. This is as’t *should* be.” He hastens the servant: “Let me see the count!—aye, marry, *go*, I say, and *fetch him hither!*”

“Now, afore God, this reverend, holy friar, our *whole city* is much bound to him!” he tells Lady Capulet.

“Nurse,” Juliet asks quietly, “will you go with me to my closet, to help me sort such needful ornaments as you think fit to furnish me for tomorrow?”

“No, not till *Thursday*,” says Lady Capulet. “*Then* is time enough.”

But Capulet is adamant. “Go, Nurse, go with her!—we’ll to church *tomorrow!*” The woman contentedly follows Juliet to her quarters.

“We shall be short in our provisions!” protests Lady Capulet. “’Tis now near night!”

“I will stir about,” says Capulet, “and all things shall be well, I warrant thee, wife! Go thou to Juliet, help to deck her up. I’ll not to bed tonight! Let me alone! I’ll play the housewife for this once!”

Heading toward the kitchen to learn what the pantry may need, he passes the valet’s station. “*What, ho!*” No answer. “They are all forth,” he mutters, having found no minion.

“Well, I will walk *myself* to Count Paris, to prepare him up for tomorrow!

“My heart is wondrous light, since this same wayward girl is so reclaimed!”

In her room, Juliet has tried on clothes for the wedding. “Aye, these attires are best. “But, gentle nurse, I pray thee, leave me to myself tonight; for I have need of many orisons”—prayers—“to move the heavens to smile upon my state. Which, well *thou* know’st, is crossèd and full of sin,” she adds—dryly, although the nurse fails to perceive it.

Her mother finds them. “What, are you busy here? Need you my help?”

“No, madam,” replies Juliet politely. “We have culled such necessaries as are behoveful for tomorrow. So please you, let me now be left alone, and let the nurse this night sit up with *you*—for, I am sure, you have your hands full, in all this so-sudden business!”

Lady Capulet nods. “Good night. Get thee to bed, and rest; for thou hast need.” She and the nurse, their supply of feminine succor exhausted, leave.

Juliet listens as the door closes. *Farewell! God knows when we shall meet again!*

I have a faint, cold fear that thrills through my veins!—it almost freezes up the heat of life! I’ll call them back again, to comfort me!—Nurse!

But she is silent. *What should she do here? My dismal scene I needs must act alone.*

Come, vial. She finds the potion. *What if this mixture do not work at all? Shall I be married again tomorrow morning? No, no!—this shall forbid it!* She sits on the edge of the bed, and places the vial on the blanket. *Lie thou there.*

What if it be a poison which the friar subtly hath ministered?—to have me dead, lest in this marriage he should be dishonoured, because he married me before to Romeo!

I fear it is!

And yet methinks I should not, for he hath ever been found a holy man.

How if, when I am laid into the tomb, I wake before the time that Romeo comes to redeem me? There’s a fearful point! Shall I not then be stifled in the vault, whose foul mouth no healthsome air breathes in, and there die strangled ere my Romeo comes?

Or if I live, is it not very likely that horrible imaginings of death might, together with the terror of the place—a vault, an ancient receptacle where for these many hundred years the bones of all my buried ancestors are packed!—where bloody Tybalt, yet but green-enearthèd, lies festering in his shroud!—where, they say, at some hours in the night spirits resort!—

Alack, alack! Is it not likely that I, thus early waking—

With what loathsome smells!—and shrieks, like mandrakes being torn out of the earth, such that living mortals, hearing them, run mad!—

Where if I wake, shall I not be distraught, environed with all these hideous fears, and madly play with my forefathers’ joints?—

And pluck from the mangled Tybalt his shroud!—

She stops—and smiles. *And in this rage, with some kinsman’s great bone as a club, dash out my desperate brains!*

She laughs. *Oh, look!—methinks I see my cousin’s ghost seeking for Romeo, who did spit his body upon a rapier’s point!* She raises one hand as if to a puppy. *Stay, Tybalt, stay!*

Pushing past misgivings—resolved to act, despite all the fears—she takes up the vial.

Romeo, I come! This do I drink to thee!

She opens the small bottle, brings it to her lips, and swallows the liquid.

Slipping the container into a pocket, she lies on the canopied bed and pulls its delicate pink-and-white curtains closed.

Chapter Ten Wedding Day

In the middle of a long night of frenetic supervising, Lady Capulet rushes into a downstairs corridor. “*Hold!*—take these keys and fetch more spices, Nurse!”

The woman; hurrying to find the butler; nods and looks back over a shoulder. “They call for dates and quinces in the pantry!”

Lord Capulet steps into the noisy kitchen. “Come, *stir*, stir, *stir!*” he urges. “The second cock hath crowed, the curfew-bell hath rung!—’tis *three o’clock!* Look to the baked meats, good Angelica; spare not for the cost!”

But his wife reproves: “Go, you cote-queen,”—mother hen, “*go!*—get you to *bed!*—i’ faith, you’ll be *sick* tomorrow for this night’s watching!”

“*No*, not a *whit*,” he insists. “*What?* I have stood watch all night ere now for *lesser* cause, and ne’er been sick!”

“Aye, you have been a-*mouse*-hunting in your time,” says Lady Capulet, “but I will guard you from such guarding *now!*” She and the nurse hurry along on their ways.

Capulet, proud of his domestic management, is unstung: “A jealous-hood, a *jealous-hood!*”

The lord of the manor pauses as several serving-men pass, carrying roasting-spits, logs, and filled baskets. He stops one. “Now, fellow, what’s there?”

“Things for the cook, sir; but I know not what...”

“Make haste, make *haste!*” The man goes—briefly a bit faster, then not.

“Sirrah, fetch *drier* logs!” the master orders a servant carrying wood. “Call Peter!—he will show thee where they are!”

The man grins. “I have, sir, a *head* that will find out *legs* for the matter, and never a troubled *peter!*” He proceeds toward the kitchen hearth.

Capulet laughs. “*Mass*, and *well said!* A merry whoreson!—thou shalt be ‘*Logger-head!*’”

Lord Capulet looks out the window and sees the brilliant burst of dawn. “I’ good faith, ’tis *day!* The count will be here with music straight, or so he *said* he would.” He listens. “I hear him nearing!” And indeed, music is being played outside, just below.

“*Nurse! Wife! What, ho!* What?—*Nurse*, I say!” She appears at the door. “Go waken Juliet! Go and trim her up! I’ll go and chat with Paris.

“*Hie*, make *haste*, make *haste!* The bridegroom, he is come already! Make *haste*, I say!”

The nurse enters Juliet’s chamber. “Mistress! What, *mistress!* Juliet!

“Fast asleep, she, I warrant her! Why, lamb? *Why*, lady? *Fie*, you slug-a-bed! *Why*, love?

“I say, *Madam!* Sweet heart!” She smiles, happily. “Why, *bride!*”

“What, not a word? Take you your pennyworths now—sleep as for a week!—for *tonight*, I warrant, Count Paris hath set up *his* rest so that you shall rest but *little!*”

There is no response.

“God forgive me, marry and amen, how *sound* is she asleep! I must needs wake her! Madam, madam... *madam!*”

She laughs. “*Aye!*—let the count take you in your bed!—*he’ll* fright you up, i’ faith!

“Will it not *be?*” She draws back the bed-curtains. “What, dressed and in your clothes, and *down* again? I must needs *wake* you! Lady! lady! *lady!*”

She touches Juliet’s hand—then her wrist.

“Alas, *alas! Help, help! My lady’s dead!*” she cries. “*Oh, well-a-day*, that ever I was *born!*
“Some aqua vitae, *ho! My lord! My lady!*”

Lady Capulet, who had been seeking the nurse, comes in, tired and irritated. “What *noise* is here?”

“Oh, *lamentable day!*”

“What is the matter?”

“Look, *look!* Oh, heavy day!”

“Oh, *me, oh, me!*” cries Lady Capulet. “My child, my only life, *revive!*—look up, or *I will die with thee!*”

“Help, *help! Call help!*”

Lord Capulet arrives, irked that his careful schedule has been disrupted. “For *shame!*—bring Juliet forth!—her lord is come!”

“She’s *dead, deceased!*” says the nurse. “She’s *dead*, alack the day!”

“Alack the day, she *is* dead,” moans Lady Capulet. “She’s dead, she’s *dead!*”

Capulet frowns. “Let me see her! *Out*, alas! She’s *cold*; her blood is settled, and her joints are stiff! Life and these lips have long been separated.”

He stares, pale now; and suddenly he feels very old. “Death lies on her like an untimely frost upon the sweetest flower of all the field....”

“*Oh, lamentable day!*” wails the nurse.

“Oh, woeful time!” groans Lady Capulet.

“Death, that hath ta’en her hence to make me wail, ties up my tongue, and will not let me speak!” says Lord Capulet.

At the bed-chamber door, Friar Laurence arrives with Count Paris; behind them are musicians brought by the groom for the ceremonies.

“Come, is the bride ready to go to church?” asks the priest.

“Ready to go,” says her father tearfully, “but never to *return.*”

He faces Paris. “Oh, son! The night before thy wedding-day hath *Death* lain with thy wife! There she lies, flower as she was, deflowered by him. Death is my son-in-law, Death is my *heir*—my daughter *he* hath wedded!

“I will die and leave him *all*—life, living—*all* is *Death’s!*”

Paris is upset. “Have I thought so long to see this morning’s face, and doth it give me such a sight as *this?*”

“Accursèd, unhappy, wretched, *hateful* day!” sobs Lady Capulet. “Most *miserable* hour that e’er Time saw in the lasting labour of his pilgrimage!

“But *one*, poor *one!*—one poor loving *child*—but one thing to rejoice and solace in—and cruel Death hath caught it from my sight!”

“Oh *woe!* Oh woeful, woeful, woeful *day!*” cries the nurse. “Most lamentable day, most woeful day, that ever, ever, I did yet behold!

“Oh, day! Oh, day! Oh, *day!* Oh, *hateful* day!

“Never was seen so black a day as this! Oh woeful day, oh *woeful day!*”

“Divorcèd, wrongèd, spited—*slain* Paris!” complains the count. “Most *detestably*, Death, by thee I’m beguiled, by cruel, *cruel* thee quite *overthrown!*” He looks down at Juliet. “O, *love!*—O, life not *live*, but lovèd in *death!*”

Capulet bemoans his own tribulation. “Despised, *distressed!*—hated, killed, *martyrèd!* Discomforting Time, why camest thou now to *murder?*—murder our *solemnity!*

“O child! O *child!*—my *soul!* And now, my child, *dead* art thou!

“*Alack!* My child is dead, and with my child my *joys* are buried!”

Young Juliet’s apparent loss goes unlamented.

Friar Laurence calls for decorum—and faith. “*Peace, ho*, for *shame!* Misery’s *cure* lives not in these miseries!

“Heaven and yourself had parts in this fair maid; now heaven hath *all!*—and all the *better* is it for the maid! *Your* part in her you could not keep from death, but Heaven keeps his part—in *eternal life!*”

“The most you sought was her *promotion*: for ’twas toward heaven she should be advanced. And *weep* ye now, seeing she *is* advanced above the clouds!—as high as *heaven itself!* *Oh*, in this you love your child so *ill* that you run mad seeing that she is *well!*”

“She’s well married that lives married long; but she’s *best* married who dies young.

“Dry up your tears, and place you rosemary”—herb of remembrance—“on this fair corpse; and, as the custom is, in all her best array, bear her to church. For though simple Nature bids us all lament, yet Nature’s tears are *Reason’s* merriment.”

But Capulet says, glumly. “All things that we ordained *festival* turn from their office to black *funeral*—our instruments to melancholy bells, our wedding cheer to a sad burial feast, our solemn hymns to sullen dirges change! Our bridal flowers serve for a buried corpse, and all things change them to their contrary.”

“Sir, go you in; and, madam, go with him,” advises Friar Laurence. “And go, Sir Paris. Every one prepare to follow this fair corpse unto her grave.

“The heavens do lour upon you for some ill; move them no *more* by crossing their high will!” he warns.

The musicians’ leader tells the nurse sadly, “Faith, we may as well put up our pipes and be gone.”

She sighs. “Aye, honest good fellows, put up, *put up*, for well you know this is a pitiful case.” She goes back up the stairs.

The chief musician, stowing his lute in a battered black box, watches her ample amble. “Aye, but by my troth, thy case”—a term for *pudenda*—“may be *amended!*”

The lovelorn, much-abused Peter comes into the corridor. “Musicians, *oh, musicians*,” he pleads, “‘Heart’s Ease’”—a popular ballad. “‘Heart’s *Ease*’—oh, if you will have me *live*, play ‘*Heart’s Ease*!’”

“Why ‘Heart’s Ease’?”

“*Oh*, musicians, because my heart itself plays ‘My Heart Is Full of *Woe*,’” Peter tells him “*Oh*, play me some *merry* tune to *comfort* me!”

“’Tis no time to play that now.”

“You will not, then?”

“No.”

“Then *I* will give to *you*, *soundly!*” says Peter, peevish.

“What will you give us?”

“No *money*, on my faith, but the *gleek!*” He makes a finger gesture. “I will give you the *minstrel!*” Another.

“Then I will give *you* the *serving-creature!*” counters the indignant lutenist, proud of his profession, with a hand motion of his own.

Peter draws a knife and brandishes its butt end. “Then will I lay the serving-creature’s *dagger* on your *pate!* I will carry no *crotchets*,”—quarter-notes, “I’ll *re* you! I’ll *fa* you!—do you *note* me?”

“An you *re* us and *fa* us, *you* will be noting *us!*” warns the lute man.

But a second musician asks for calm. “Pray you, put *up* your dagger—and put *out* your wit!”

Peter, resigned to doing without the song’s comfort, retires glumly to the servants’ quarters.

“What a pestilent knave is this same!” says the leader.

“*Hang* him, Jack!

“Come, we’ll in here, tarry as mourners—and stay for *lunch!*”

Chapter Eleven Reunited

To the south, in Lombardy, Romeo walks cheerfully along a quiet road on the outskirts of Mantua, not far from the inn at which he is lodging.

If I may trust the flattering truth of sleep, my dreams presage some joyful news at hand! My bosom's lord sits lightly in his throne, and all this day an unaccustomed spirit lifts me above the ground with cheerful thoughts!

I dreamt my lady came and found me dead—strange dream, that gives a dead man leave to think!—and breathed such life in at my lips with kisses that I revived, and was an emperor!

Ah, me! How sweet is love itself possessèd, when but love's shadows are so rich in joy!

He sees his manservant approaching on horseback. “News from Verona!” cries Romeo eagerly. “How now, Balthasar! Dost thou not bring me letters from the friar?”

“How doth my lady? Is my father well?”

“How fares my *Juliet*?—that I ask again, for nothing can be ill, if *she* be well!”

The valet, dismounting, is solemn. “Then she is well,” he says, “and nothing can be ill: her body sleeps in Capel's monument, and her immortal part with *angels* lives.

“I saw her laid low in her kindred's vault, and immediately took post to tell it you.” He sees that Romeo is staggered. “Oh, pardon me for bringing these ill news, since you *did* leave it as my office, sir....”

Romeo stares, confounded. “Is it even *so*?” In the fading daylight, the place now seems grotesque, the bland village dismal and horrid—and fate itself hostile. “Then I *defy* you, stars!

“Thou know'st my lodging,” he tells the man. “Get me ink and paper, and hire post-horses. I will hence tonight!” Despair again drives him.

Balthasar knows that Romeo's return to Verona under banishment would mean death. “I do beseech you, sir, have *patience*! Your looks are *pale and wild*, and do import some *misadventure*!”

“Thou art deceived. Leave me, and do the things I bid thee do.” Romeo tells him sternly. “Hast thou no letters to me from the friar?”

“No, my good lord.”

“No matter. Get thee gone, and hire those horses; I'll be with thee straight.” Balthasar bows, mounts his horse, and rides on toward the inn.

Well, Juliet, I will lie with thee tonight! thinks Romeo, walking back to the hostelry. *Let's see—as for means....*

O mischief, thou art swift to enter in the thoughts of desperate men! I do remember an apothecary—and hereabouts he dwells—whom late I noted in tattered clothes, with overwhelmed brows, culling of simples. The frowning, unkempt man was afield, searching for aromatic herbs to pick.

Meagre were his looks; sharp misery had worn him to the bones. And in his needy shop a tortoise hung, an alligator, stuffed, and other skins of ill-shaped fishes—about, on his shelves, a beggarly account of empty boxes, cheap earthen pots, bladders and musty seeds, remnants of packthread, and old cakes of rose-petal were thinly scattered, to make up a showing.

Noting this penury, to myself I said, 'Now, if a man did need a poison, whose sale is instant death in Mantua, here lives a caitiff wretch would sell it to him!'

Oh, that thought did but forerun my need!—and this same needy man must sell it me.

As I remember, this should be the house.... “What, ho! Apothecary!”

By and by, the frail druggist opens his door. “Who calls so loud?”

“Come hither, man,” says Romeo. “I see that thou art poor; hold....” He unties a leather pouch at his side, pours coins into his left hand, and shows them. “There is forty ducats. Let me have a dram of poison—such soon-speeding kind as will disperse itself through all the veins so

that the life-weary taker may *fall dead*, and the trunk may be discharged of breath as violently as hasty powder, fired, doth hurry from the fatal *cannon's* womb!"

"Such mortal drugs I *have*," says the apothecary warily, "but Mantua's law is death to any that issues them."

"Art so bare and full of wretchedness, yet *fearest* thou to die?" asks Romeo. "*Famine* is in thy cheeks—*need* and *oppression* stare from thine eyes, *beggary* hangs in contempt upon thy back! The world is not thy friend—nor the world's *law*. The world affords no law to make *thee* rich; then be not poor—but *break* it, and take this!"

Says the downtrodden man, "My poverty, but not my will, consents." He turns and goes into the shop.

Romeo enters, and lays the money on a dusty table. "I pay thy poverty, and not thy will."

The apothecary returns to him with a glass vial. "Put this in any liquid thing you will, and drink it off," he says. "Even if you had the strength of *twenty* men, it would dispatch you straight!"

"There is thy *gold*," says Romeo, "a *worse* poison to men's souls, doing more murders in this loathsome world than these poor compounds that thou mayst not sell. I sell *thee* poison; thou hast sold me none.

"Farewell. Buy food," he tells the too-thin man, "and get thyself in flesh."

Romeo walks toward the inn, the lethal liquid placed carefully in a doublet pocket. *Come, cordial, and not poison—go with me to Juliet's grave; for there must I use thee!*

Entering his austere cell tonight, Friar Laurence is surprised to hear the greeting of another monk: "Holy Franciscan friar! *Brother, ho!*"

"This same should be the voice of *Friar John!* Welcome from Mantua! What says Romeo?—or, if his mind be writ, give me his letter."

Friar John, concerned, speaks urgently: "Going to find a barefoot brother, one of our order here with me in this city to visit the sick, I found him—but the *searchers* of the town, suspecting that we both had been in a house where the infectious pestilence did reign, *sealed up the doors*, and *would not let us forth!* And thus, there was my speeding to Mantua *stayed!*" He was stopped by officials trying to prevent spreading of the plague.

"Who bore my letter, then, to Romeo?" asks Friar Laurence.

"I could not send it!—here it is again—nor get a messenger to bring it *thee*, so fearful were they of infection!"

Friar Laurence is dismayed. "*Unhappy fortune!* By my brotherhood, the letter was not slight, but full of charge of *dear import!*—and the neglecting of it may do much *danger!*"

"Friar John, go hence!—get me an iron wrenching bar, and bring it straight unto my cell!"

"Brother, I'll go and bring it thee!" John hurries away.

Laurence is concerned. *Now must I to the monument alone! Within three hours will fair Juliet wake! She will beshrew me much that Romeo hath had no notice of these happenings!*

But I will write again to Mantua, and keep her at my cell till Romeo come.

He thinks of Juliet. *Poor living corpse, closed in a dead man's tomb!*

Soon he leaves the monastery, moving carefully through the darkness.

In an old cemetery at Verona, Count Paris and his young page, who bears a torch and an armful of flowers, approach the mausoleum belonging to the Capulet family.

Paris unlocks the tall door made of iron bars. "Give me thy torch, boy," he says. "Hence, and stand apart." In the moonlight, the entrance is discernible without the glaring flame. He hands back the torch. "Yet put it out; for I would not be seen.

"Under yond yew trees, lay thee all along, holding thine ear *close* to the hollow ground—it being loose, unfirm, with digging up of graves—so no foot shall tread upon it but thou shalt *hear*. Whistle then to me, as signal that thou hear'st something approach.

“Give me those flowers. Do as I bid thee; go.”

Thinks the boy, extinguishing the light on the turf, *I am almost afraid to stand alone here in the churchyard!—yet I will adventure....* He walks slowly in the dark to lie near the burial plots, listening—and watching, wide-eyed—under the boughs of baleful, baneful evergreen.

Inside the tomb, Paris gently places the blooms on Juliet’s bier, and kneels before her. *Sweet flower, with flowers thy bridal bed I strew!*

He looks around. *Oh, woe! Thy canopy is dust and stones—which with scented water I will dew, or, wanting that, with tears distillèd by moans! The obsequies that for thee I will nightly keep shall be to strew thy grave and weep!*

Then he hears the page’s whistle.

The boy gives warning something doth approach! What cursèd foot wanders this way tonight, to cross my obsequies and true-love’s rite? Annoyed, he comes outside. What?—with a torch! Muffle me, night, awhile....

He closes the door, and moves into shadow beside the building just before Romeo arrives with Balthasar; the servant carries a torch and a heavy black bar.

“Give me that wrenching iron,” Romeo tells the man. “Hold... take this letter; early in the morning, see thou deliver it to my lord and father.

“Give me the light. Upon thy *life* I charge thee, whate’er thou hear’st or seest, keep away and do not interrupt me in my course!” Romeo craves privacy—and he wants to implicate no one.

“Therefore *hence!*—*be gone!*”

“But if thou dost *return*, curious to pry into what I further shall intend to do, by heaven, I will *tear thee joint by joint* and strew this hungry churchyard with thy *limbs!* The time and my intents are *savage!*—*wild*, more fierce and more inexorable far than hungry *tigers* or the *roaring sea!*”

The lad only nods. “I will be gone, sir, and not trouble you.”

“So shalt thou show me friendship,” says Romeo, handing him a pouch of gold ducats. “Take thou that. Live, and be prosperous—and farewell, good fellow!” Balthasar bows and moves away toward their horses.

But the loyal servant thinks, as he walks: *For all this same, I’ll hide me hereabout—his looks I fear, and his intents are dubious!* Balthasar stands a short distance away, concealed among some trees, to observe.

Romeo sets the torch in a bracket on the wall and stares up at the massive stone monument. He brandishes the bar. *Thou detestable maw, thou womb of death, gorgèd with the dearest morsel of the earth, thus I’ll enforce thy rotten jaws to open!—and, in despite, cram thee with more food!* He goes to pry open the door.

Paris watches, amazed. *This is that banished, haughty Montague!—who murdered my love’s cousin, from which grief, it is supposed, the fair creature died! And here he has come to do some villainous shame to their dead bodies! I will apprehend him!*

He steps forward, the light behind him. “Stop thy unhallowed toil, vile *Montague!*” he cries. “Can vengeance be pursued further than *death?*” he demands harshly, as Romeo, startled, backs away. “Condemnèd *villain*, I do *apprehend* thee!

“Obey, and go with me; for thou must *die!*”

Romeo regards him with profound sadness. “I must indeed. And therefore came I hither.

“Good gentle youth, tempt not a desperate man; fly hence and leave me!” But Paris does not stir. “Think upon these gone—let *them* affright thee

“I *beseech* thee, youth, put not another sin upon my head by urging me to fury! *Oh, be gone!*”

Paris draws his sword.

“By heaven, I love thee better than *myself!*” cries Romeo in desperation, “for I come hither *armed against myself!* *Stay not—begone!* *Live!*—and hereafter say a *madman* in ’s mercy bade thee away.”

“I do *defy* thy conjurations!” says Paris, “and apprehend thee for a *felon* here!”

Cries Romeo, exasperated, "*Wilt thou provoke me? Then have at thee, boy!*" He draws, and they move closer, joining in clashing combat.

Oh, Lord!—they fight! thinks Paris's page. *I will go call the watch!* The boy runs into town for help.

But it is too late for his poor master. "*Oh! I am slain!*" The count falls, bleeding heavily, to the ground. "If thou be merciful," he groans, "open the tomb... lay me with Juliet...." And with that, he dies.

"In faith, I will," says weary Romeo, throwing down his sword. He moves toward the corpse. *Let me peruse this face....*

He frowns. *Mercutio's kinsman, noble Count Paris!*

He tries to recall: *What said my man, when my betossed soul did not attend him as we rode? I think he told me Paris should have married Juliet! Said he not so?—or did I dream it so?*

Or am I mad, hearing him talk of Juliet, to think it was so...?

He looks down at the body. *Ah, give me thy hand, one writ with me in sour misfortune's book!—I'll bury thee in this triumphing grave.* He pulls the corpse into the mausoleum. *A grave? Oh, no!—a lantern, slaughtered youth!—for here lies Juliet, and her beauty makes this vault a feasting presence!—full of light! Dead, lie thou here—by a dead man interred.*

How oft when men are at the point of death have they been merry—which their keepers call a 'lightening before death.' *Oh, how may I call this a lightening?*

Peering about in the dank gloom, he finds Juliet, lying motionless.

He stands beside her—and sobs. "O my love! My wife!

"Death, that hath sucked the honey of thy breath, hath had no power yet upon thy beauty!—thou art *not conquerèd!*—beauty's ensign yet is crimson in thy lips and in thy cheeks, and Death's pale flag is not advanced there."

Beyond her he discerns another Capulet bier. "Tybalt, liest *thou* there in thy bloody sheet? Oh, what more favour can I do to thee than, with that hand that cut thy *youth* in twain, to sunder *his* that was thine enemy? Forgive me, cousin.

"O dear *Juliet*, why art thou yet so *fair*? Shall I believe that unsubstantial Death is *amorous*, and that the lean, abhorred monster keeps thee here in dark to be his paramour?

"For fear of that, I still will *stay* with thee, and never from this palace of dim night depart again! Here, here will I remain—with the worms that are thy chamber-maids.

"Here will I start my everlasting rest, and shake the yoke of inauspicious stars from this world-wearied flesh! Eyes, look your last; arms, take your last embrace; and, lips, O you, the doors of breath, seal with a righteous kiss the dateless bargain with engrossing death."

He leans and kisses Juliet tenderly. Then, sitting on the stone bier beside his bride, he pulls the small bottle from a pocket.

"Come, bitter conductor, come, unsavoury guide!" He uncorks the vial. "Thou desperate pilot, now run at once onto the dashing rocks my sea-sick, weary boat!

"Here's to my love!" He swallows the undiluted poison.

He coughs and chokes. *O true apothecary!—thy drugs are quick!*

Thus, with a kiss, I die!

Romeo's lips touch Juliet's. His vision fades, and he falls, lying beside her.

Making his way from the far end of the churchyard, near the city, Friar Laurence hurries among the tombstones as best he can in the dark, burdened with a lantern and the iron bar. *Saint Francis be my speed! How oft tonight have my old feet stumbled at graves!* He sees a man ahead. "Who's there?" he calls.

"Here's a *friend*, and one that knows you well," says Balthasar.

"Bliss be upon you," says the monk as they meet. "Tell me, good my friend, what torch is yond, that vainly lends its light to grubs and eyeless skulls? As I discern, it burneth at the Capulets' monument."

“It doth so, holy sir—and there is my *master*, one that you love.”

“Who is it?”

“Romeo.”

The priest is stunned—and alarmed. “How *long* hath he been there?”

“Full half an hour.”

Laurence, aghast, starts forward. “Go with me to the vault!”

“I *dare not*, sir! My master knows not but that I am gone hence—and fearfully did menace me with death if I did stay to look on his intents!”

“Stay, then; I’ll go alone! *Fear* comes upon me!—*oh, much* I fear some ill, unlucky thing!”

“As I did... *sleep* under this yew-tree here,” says Balthasar guardedly, “I *dreamt* my master and another fought, and that my master *slew him!*”

Friar Laurence starts running. “*Romeo!*”

He stops just outside the mausoleum, gasping and sweating. *Alack, alack!—what blood is this which stains the stony entrance of this sepulchre? What means this masterless and gory sword, to lie, discoloured, by this place of peace?*

He hurries into the tomb. “*Romeo!*” He spots the body. *Oh... pale!*

Who else? What?—Paris, too!—all steeped in blood!

Ah, what an unkind hour is guilty of this lamentable chance!

He lifts the lantern to look at Juliet. *The lady stirs!*

Slowly, blearily, she awakens from the chemical trance. She sits up, weakly, blinking and trying to steady herself with one arm, and rubs her eyes.

“*O comforting friar!*” she says, recognizing Laurence. “Where is my lord? I do remember well where I should be, and there I *am!* Where is my Romeo?”

Voices, approaching but still distant, can be heard—most likely city officers, the priest thinks. “I hear some noise! Lady, come from this nest of death, contagion, and unnatural sleep!” he urges. “A greater power than we can contradict hath thwarted our intents!

“*Come!—come away!* The husband of thy bosom there lies *dead*—and Paris, too!”

She stares down at the body beside her; suddenly she is again numb.

Laurence tugs at her arm. “*Come!* I’ll dispose thee among a sisterhood of holy nuns,” he promises. “Stay not to question, for the *watch* is coming! *Come!*” He moves toward the entrance as the voices grow louder. “*Now, good Juliet!—I dare no longer stay!*”

She shakes her head sadly. “Go, get thee hence, for I will not away.”

The monk flees.

Young Juliet, alone, beholds the grim scene around her.

What’s here? A phial, closed within my true-love’s hand?

Poison, I see, hath been his timeless end. O churl!—drank all, and left no friendly drop to help me along after? I will kiss thy lips; haply some poison yet doth hang on them, to make me die with the restorative.

She kisses Romeo. *Thy lips are warm.* Softly, she touches his face.

From outside comes the voice of a running watchman: “*Lead, boy! Which way?*”

Yea, noise? Then I’ll be brief. She draws Romeo’s knife, grasps the hilt with both hands. *O happy dagger!* She sets the point against her chest. *This is thy sheath! There rust, and let me die!* She draws a long breath, then forces the blade inward.

Her eyes widen, then close. She falls to one side, her head coming to rest just over Romeo’s heart. And there Juliet dies.

Chapter Twelve 'All Are Punished'

Among the graves, Count Paris's page directs a town constable, who is leading several deputies. "This is the place!—there, where the torch doth burn!"

"The ground is bloody!" notes the officer, reaching the site. "Search about the churchyard," he tells his men. "Go, some of you—whoe'er you find, attach!" Anyone found here tonight is to be arrested.

He proceeds into the crypt—and is appalled: "*Pitiful sight!*"

The constable goes to the bodies. "Here lies the count, *slain!* And Juliet—bleeding, warm, and *newly* dead, who here hath lain these two days *buried!*"

"Go, tell the prince!" he orders a minion. "Run to the *Capulets*; raise up the *Montagues!* Some others, *search!*"

"We see the ground whereon these woes do lie; but the *true* ground of all these piteous woes we cannot without circumstance descry."

A deputy brings Balthasar to him. "Here's Romeo's man; we found him in the churchyard."

"Hold him in safety,"—under guard, "till the prince come hither."

Two officers pull Friar Laurence along by the arms.

"Here is a *friar* that trembles, sighs and *weeps!* We took this lantern and this iron from him, as he was coming from this churchyard side."

"A great suspicion! Stay the friar too."

Order, if not calm, has come to the still-dark cemetery after the arrival of Prince Escalus and his regal retinue.

"What misadventure is so *early* up, that calls our person from our morning's rest?" he asks the chief of the watch.

Before the officer can answer, angry Lord Capulet demands of him, "What should it *be*, that they so shriek abroad?" Aroused from sleep, he and his wife have just arrived with others of their household.

She is worried. "The people in the street cry '*Romeo,*' some '*Juliet,*' and some '*Paris!*'—and all run, with open outcry, toward our monument...."

The prince again asks the constable, "What fear is this which startled our ears?"

"Sovereign, here lies the Count Paris, *slain!*—and Romeo, *dead!*—and Juliet, dead *before*, warm and *newly* killed!"

"Search, seek, and *know* how this foul murder comes!" commands Escalus.

The officer points to the two being held: "Here is a friar—and slaughtered Romeo's man—with instruments upon them fit to open these dead-men's tombs...."

But Escalus has handed the reins to an attendant; the prince enters the monument, and the noble couple follow.

"*O heaven!*" cries Capulet. "Oh, wife, look how our daughter *bleeds!* This dagger hath *mistaken!*—for, *lo*, its place in the back of *Montague* is empty, and it mis-sheathes in my daughter's bosom!"

"*Oh, me!*" moans Lady Capulet, "this sight of death is as a bell that summons my old age to a sepulchre!"

The prince sees another nobleman outside, and motions for him to enter. "Come, Montague," he says angrily, "for thou art early up, to see thy son and heir more early *down.*"

Lord Montague is in a daze. "Alas, my liege, my *wife* is *dead* tonight!—grief over my son's exile hath stopped her breath. What further woe conspires against mine age?"

"Look, and thou shalt see," Escalus tells him.

Montague finds Romeo. “O thou untaught!” he weeps, touching his son’s cheek. “What *manners* is in this?—to press before thy father to the grave!”

Prince Escalus points to silence Capulet: “*Seal up* the mouth of outrage for a while, till we can clear these ambiguities, and know their spring, their head, their true descent.

“And then will I be *general* of your woes, and lead you, even to *death!*” he tells the two lords. “Meantime *forbear*, and let patience be slave to mischance.

“Bring forth the parties in suspicion.”

“I am the greatest,” groans Friar Laurence, “*able* to do least, yet most *suspected*, as the time and place do make against me for this direful murder. But here I stand, both to impeach and purge—myself condemn, and myself excuse.”

“Then say at once what thou dost know in this!” the prince tells him.

“I will be brief,” says the graying monk, “for my short date of breath is not so long as is a tedious tale.

“Romeo, there dead, was *husband* to that Juliet; and she, there dead, that Romeo’s faithful *wife!* I *married* them!—and their stolen marriage-day was Tybalt’s *doomsday*, whose untimely death banished from the city the new-made bridegroom—for whom—and not for Tybalt—Juliet pined.”

He faces the Capulets. “*You*, to remove that siege of grief from her, betrothed and would have married her *perforce* to Count Paris. Then comes she to me, and with wild looks bids me devise some means to rid her from this *second* marriage—or in my cell there would she *kill herself!*

“Then I gave her, as tutored by my art, a *sleeping* potion, which took effect as I intended—for it wrought on her the *form* of death. Meantime I writ to Romeo that he should hither come, to help to take her from her borrowed grave, on this dire night, it being the time the potion’s force should cease.

“But he who bore my letter, Friar John, was by accident *stayed*, and yesternight returned my letter back!

“Then, all alone at the prefixed hour of her waking, came I to take her from her kindred’s vault, meaning to keep her hidden at my cell till I could send to Romeo.

“But when I came, some minute ere the time of her awaking, here lay the noble Paris and true Romeo, *untimely dead!*

“She waked, and I entreated her come forth and bear this work of heaven with patience.

“But then a noise did scare me from the tomb,” he confesses. “And she, too desperate, would not *go* with me—but, as it seems, did violence on herself!

“All this I know; and to the marriage her nurse is privy.”

He kneels before the prince. “And if aught in this miscarried by my fault, let my old life be sacrificed, some hour before its time, unto the rigour of severest law.”

“We long have known thee for a *holy* man,” Escalus tells him. He looks around. “Where’s *Romeo*’s man? What can *he* say in this?”

Balthasar is led forward. “I brought my master news of Juliet’s death; and then in post”—riding fast—“he came from Mantua to this same place, to this same monument!

“This letter he early bade me give his father—and, going into the vault, threatened me with death! I left him there, but departed not.”

“Give me the letter,” says the prince. “I will look on it.

“Where is the count’s page, that raised the watch?” The lad is brought to him. “Sirrah, what made your master in this place?”

“He came with flowers to strew on his lady’s grave,” says the trembling boy, wringing his cap, “and bid me stand aloof—and so I did! Anon comes one with light to ope the tomb; and by and by my master *drew* on him! And then I ran away to call the watch.”

Prince Escalus unfolds Romeo’s message and reads. “This letter doth make good the friar’s words—their course of love, the tidings of her death.... And here he writes that he did buy a poison of a poor ’pothecary, and therewithal came to this vault to die, and lie with Juliet.”

For a moment, he stands deep in thought. He looks toward the dead lovers.

“Where be these *enemies? Capulet! Montague!*” The noblemen come before him.

“See what a *scourge* is laid upon your *hate*, that heaven finds means to kill your joys using *love!*”

“And *I*, for allowing your discords, too have lost two kinsmen. All are punishèd.”

Lord Capulet reaches forward. “O brother Montague, give me thy hand—this is my daughter’s jointure,”—widow’s portion, “for no more can I demand.”

“But I can give thee *more*,” says Lord Montague, “for I will raise her statue in *pure gold*—so that while Verona by that name’s extolled, there shall no figure at such rate be set as that of true and faithful Juliet!”

“*As rich* shall *Romeo*’s by his lady’s be,” vows Capulet, “poor sacrifices of our enmity!”

Prince Escalus looks out as a light rain begins to fall. “A glooming peace this morning with it brings,” he says. “The sun, for sorrow, will not show his head.

“Go hence, to have more talk of these sad things. Some shall be pardoned, and some punishèd.

“For never was a story of more woe, than this of Juliet and her Romeo.”